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Great Lives

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1472....Birth.
1498....Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.
1509....Almoner to Henry VIII.
1512....Unofficial War Minister.
1513....Battle of the Spurs.
1514....Bishop of Lincoln and Tournai and
Archbishop of York.
Building of Hampton Court begun.
1515....Cardinal, Lord Chancellor and Prime
Minister.
1517....Treaty of Noyen.
1518....Peace of London.
Rendition of Tournai—Legate *a latere*—
Bishop of Bath and Wells.
Pensioner of France.
1519....Inauguration of the “Balance of
Power.”
1520....Field of the Cloth of Gold.
1521....Execution of Buckingham.
Candidate for the Papacy.
1523....Forced loans.
1524....Legate for life.
1525....Dissolution of smaller monasteries.
1526....Raid on Rome.
1527....Coalition formed against Wolsey.
Legatine Court opens.
1529....Exile from Court—fall and partial re-
covery.
1530....Journey to York—arrest and death.

TO
ROBSON W. O. DALTRY
IN AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

The state of Europe – Wolsey's birth and upbringing – his character and environment – early life at Court – his position at Henry VII's death – life at the Court of the new King.

THERE is no century in European history which opened so unpromisingly and closed amid such a teeming wealth of promise as the fifteenth. Perhaps the nineteenth century saw a greater change in the outward face of things – invention, scientific discovery, and industrial revolt – and the sixteenth endured a larger number of earthquakes ; but outward changes often leave the mind and soul untransformed, while earthquakes do little more than cause panic and bewilderment. The seed of the Reformation was planted in the fifteenth century, by those who least foresaw the harvest in which it would result. Caxton and Colet, Columbus and Erasmus, all in their different ways generated the new life ; and the century which gave them birth marks the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, a womb in which all that was to be born in the ages to come was seething and moving.

That new body of thought and feeling came forth into a world that was torn and desperate ; and, for its upbringing, had the worst environment

imaginable. Church and State had become merged in a dark sea of corruption, in which isolated monasteries were the only beacons, and a few isolated prophets the only hope. France had been ruled by one bad king after another. Perhaps the worst of the Borgias sat in the Chair of Peter. Torquemada had lighted the first fierce flames of the Spanish Inquisition – a conflagration that would not die out for three hundred years – and England was in a state of civil war. The century which had dawned without a single star in the sky, and with nothing but the belligerent affairs at Orleans, and the slow resurrection of a continent from the black death, closed amid a gathering storm, of which the first flashes and roars were already to be seen and heard. It is, therefore, of small wonder that the stars which began to appear, Colet, Fisher, More, and Erasmus, were slow in making their presence felt in Europe.

In England their influence and their teaching found a readier home. For the soil was less shaken, more prepared. The country's isolation as an island, its distance from Rome, and the fact that the voice of Wycliffe had been slow in dying, all helped to keep a more open spirit alive than was possible in the remainder of Europe; but England, from the days of the Roman occupation and before it, had always been a stage to itself, a kind of miniature continent; and it is really no more surprising that the birth of the Renaissance in Europe found it in the Wars of the Roses than

that the Great War found it occupied in the throes of a squabble with Ireland. In neither case was it long in settling its affairs and turning to the larger issue, and it may be said that on Bosworth Field England emerged from the childhood of mediævalism into the youth of the Renaissance, with all its attendant glory, its storminess, and its growth.

Into the dawning era, in an obscure corner of Ipswich, Thomas Wolsey was born. He was the child who, more than any other in England, and among the first few of the Continent, would be called upon to weather the approaching storm. It might almost be said that his little body epitomised the new body which came forth in the dark wildness of the European night of 1472. He was of an age with Copernicus, and but a few years the senior of Luther and the junior of Columbus. "With Wolsey," as Mr. Belloc has said, "did it lie more than with any other man whether the good or the evil fate should prevail. More than any other man in that time of conquerors, discoverers, and insane ambitions, of flaming protests against evil, and of evil unchained, this man had it in his power, had he but known his chances, to save our world ; because he stood for so many years at the helm of a nation small but united, free from foreign menace, and with all its resources at his absolute command. There was no other such complete opportunity in Europe." How far can it be maintained that he was aware of these

opportunities, that he deliberately crushed them in his hunger for power and fame ; and how far did he even realise, if at all, the opportunity which he lost ? The answer to these questions, as to many others that will dawn in the enquiring mind, must be answered by a disclosure of the life that he lived and the actions in which he revealed his hopes, his wishes, his achievements, and, not least, his fears.

He was born into the artisan class, and his father was probably a butcher of the superior kind. As this story of his parentage was first buzzed round by his enemies at the time of his downfall, it is quite possibly untrue. It is certain, however, that Robert Wolsey was a grazier, and quite possible also that he was a wool merchant. He died possessed of land and property, both in and about Ipswich ; and a fairly trustworthy tradition, which there is no reason to doubt, points to a house in St. Nicholas Street as that of Thomas Wolsey's birth. Little is known of his family, though he may have had two brothers ; but, if so, their father made no provision for them in his will, though the sister, Joan, is mentioned.

From his earliest years Wolsey displayed himself as a boy of powerful intelligence ; and a brilliant career in the Grammar School at Ipswich terminated in a degree which he took at Magdalen College, Oxford, at the age of fifteen, when he became known as " the boy bachelor." His progress through the University was rapid ;

and we find him a Fellow of his college and Master of the Grammar School attached to it, as well as Bursar, in 1498. It is very probable that the foundations which Wolsey has left at Oxford as memorials to himself were made at least in partial gratitude for the honours he achieved there.

One result of his being a star of the University in his own day is that much of his career there is accessible ; but Wolsey was so strangely the object of malice and cloudy romance that legends go back to his very birth ; and his Oxford career is certainly not exempt from them. One such "legend," if legend it be, is more substantial than most, and, as it throws much light upon events that were to follow in the crisis of his power, may be retold briefly. Wolsey was ordained priest in 1498, and within a year of that event he was requested to resign the bursary of Magdalen for spending the college funds, without the leave of the college authorities, upon the erection of Magdalen Tower. The account-book is missing, so that the truth of the tradition can never be verified ; and, although Bishop Creighton rejects the story on the ground that the tower was completed "in the year that Wolsey became Bursar,"¹ it has been retorted by Professor Pollard that there is no reason why Wolsey should not have anticipated college authority in order to discharge² the debt. Moreover, so impartial

¹ Bishop Creighton, *Cardinal Wolsey*, p. 19.

² A. F. Pollard, *Wolsey*, p. 12 (note).

a historian as Gairdner accepts the story after careful examination ; and no other explanation of his resignation is forthcoming.

A Church that was sunk so deep in avarice would not do more than wink at such an offence ; whether he was guilty or not, the young Wolsey lost no respectability by his resignation ; and we find him almost immediately presented with the living of Lymington, in Somerset. This preferment was the result of the favour of the Marquis of Dorset, in whose gift the living resided, for the younger sons of the marquis came beneath Wolsey's care, and fell under his spell, while at Magdalen. The result was an invitation for their tutor to spend Christmas with the family ; and Wolsey, whose fortune it was ever to impress with his vital intelligence and powerful personality those in high places, was shortly afterwards presented with the living. Nor was the little Oxford scandal the only fault with which he was charged during these early years. During his stay with the Marquis of Dorset he was thrown into the stocks by Sir Amyas Paulet of Hinton St. George, a neighbouring squire who later became a Middle Templar, for exuberant behaviour after a fair. The only piece of evidence for this on which one can bite at all is the fact that his biographer, Cavendish, employs it as an explanation for the Cardinal's sour behaviour to Paulet in the days of his own Lord Chancellorship.

Paulet's behaviour left no more smirch upon

Wolsey's character than did the story of Magdalen Tower ; and in the year 1501, the year of Dorset's death, we find him growing rich in favours. He obtained a dispensation to hold two other benefices with Lymington ; and to be absent from them all. This absence was highly to be desired, as, almost simultaneously with them, he was promoted to a private chaplaincy to Henry Dean, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was the first real step into power which Wolsey had yet experienced ; but it seemed, even now, that his career was to be blighted at the start. For his patrons were dying as he rose in power. Dorset had died in 1501, within two years of his becoming Wolsey's patron ; and Dean himself had died in 1503, within two years of the promotion. It was lucky for Wolsey, however, that the Archbishop's executor, Sir Reginald Bray, had his eye on him. He deputed many of the funeral arrangements to him – a task that would have suited mightily his love of pomp and organising capacity – and, not long after the burial, obtained for him the chaplaincy to Sir Richard Nanfan, deputy-lieutenant of Calais.

This move was of the greatest significance in Wolsey's career, although he almost certainly did not realise the fact at the time. For Nanfan held one of the most important diplomatic offices in the kingdom, and one, moreover, that would only be entrusted to a personal friend of the King. Nanfan, being an old man, was looking about for

a deputy whom he could trust to do the bulk of his work. It was not long before Wolsey's abundant energy and business capacity made themselves clear ; and it was not long before Nanfan withdrew and laid the whole burden of his office upon Wolsey. In 1505 he resigned, and returned to England to spend his last years in peace ; and, if any further need of evidence for his confidence in Wolsey be demanded, it is disclosed by the fact that he appointed him his executor at death. On his master's death, Wolsey's office of chaplain would naturally cease ; but Sir Richard had already obtained for his admirable deputy promotion to a chaplaincy to King Henry VII himself.

At the Marquis of Dorset's death, Wolsey had resigned the quiet living of Lymington. Now he was terribly near the throne at the age of thirty-five. He had been ordained barely ten years when a vista of possibilities opened up before him – a goal at the end of any road he might take, and the chance of swaying the fortunes of a kingdom. It is useless to waste time in speculating on his speculations, but there can be no doubt that a man of Wolsey's ambitious temperament and lightning grasp upon all the details of his situation must have seen in a flash what the opportunities were. Whether he ever contemplated, like the infinitely greater Thomas More, the other side of the picture, ever scented danger in so close a proximity to the Tudor throne, or was ever

appalled by the spectacle of his own rise to power and wealth, with the Star Chamber in full working order so near, is more doubtful. That would have required imagination, a gift of which this essentially practical statesman possessed not a fragment.

Had he possessed imaginative vision, there can be little doubt that he would never have climbed to the royal favour ; and although he left behind so little of permanent value that this would have left the history of England almost entirely unchanged, his earthly career would have been a very different one. For he grew up into a world that was rapidly flowering into a renaissance ; and he enjoyed, when at the height of his power, the friendship of the first stars to glitter in that intellectual firmament. Yet he himself remained aloof from all studies, in spite of a heavily scholastic education, and confessed, when he had joined his royal master in arguing the Thomist metaphysic, to a weariness rather than to any enlightenment. Thus he remained, shallow-minded and big-brained – extraverted – to the end of his career, and the character which he formed during these years of climbing never left him. It only disclosed its various sides as circumstances called them out ; and the tune which resulted was but a series of variations on a single theme.

Now and then we see glimpses of an unsuspected emotionalism or a repressed religious sense ; but we never see a “ Wolsey-as-he-might-have-been.”

At least his eye was single ; and he never fought in the dark unless that darkness was produced by another. The undimmed pursuit of a main idea, swift striking, and the capacity to suffer fools when sufferance was the only gateway to success, were his virtues ; and he was guilty of one vice which riddled his soul with sins, though, to the end, it never blinded him. That vice was ambition : - the sin that obsessed the mind of Shakespeare in its noonday and is said to have brought the angels to Hell. He put the attainment of power before anything else - God, neighbour, and the indulgence of self ; and such character as he had was due mainly to the training and discipline that it underwent in this field.

There can be no doubt that the growth of his powers was greatly stimulated by the good fortunes of his early life ; and that the powerful personality of which he made such unfailing use stood him in admirable stead for the achievement of his ends ; but it is no less certain that, had he been an introvert instead of an extravert - an artist, a philosopher, or a mystic - he would not have come into power. He is one of the very few instances in history of a man who achieved what he did because of his limitations. It was his lack of insight which made him daring, his lack of vision that kept him floating when another might have sunk, and his total inability to smell a danger until it had assumed some bodily reality that saved him from a panic which might have ruined him.

In regard to his emotional life, there is not much to be said ; and it must be admitted that this is probably more because of his lack of emotional material than for any asceticism on his part. Nevertheless, a man of his physique must almost certainly have suffered from at least occasional sensual hungers ; and the attraction of his personality would have provided opportunity for their gratification. It was an age of clerical licence ; and, even allowing for the absurdity of some of the charges brought against the monasteries, there is glaring evidence of a lax morality throughout the Continent, though less in countries of a northern clime. Moreover, in England the lack of conscience which many ecclesiastics displayed in this respect was largely owing to the secular nature of many of the offices which they held. Church and State were so completely merged that a celibate priesthood not only meant that some men who had no vocation for any pastoral duties had to become ordained in order to administer State affairs, but that a section of the people who were really no more than State clerks were called upon to take celibate vows. Such a "celibate civil service," as Professor Pollard calls it, was likely to behave with greater irregularity than a celibate priesthood ; and, in 1523, Wolsey was himself responsible for an Act of Parliament which absolved the six clerks of Chancery from taking these vows.

Wolsey was himself "uncanonically married,"

as the polite phraseology of the day had it, to the daughter of one Larke, about the time of his rise to power ; and the phrase meant something more than a cloak for vice. For he appears to have remained faithful to her, as though she was his lawful wife, until her lawful marriage with one Legh of Cheshire. Wolsey seems to have suffered no pangs at parting from her, in spite of the fact that she had borne him a son and a daughter, but passed her on with a large dowry that, ironically enough, was to prove one of the charges at his own impeachment. Her brother, Thomas Larke, became Wolsey's confessor and a chaplain to the King ; which shows that Wolsey bore the family no grudge. This helps to substantiate the theory that he was not a man of strong passions, but cohabited for physical reasons only. His nature was, moreover, exuberantly robust and free from perversion, and one that would have given a modern psycho-analyst small gain for his trouble.

This total lack of any abnormal strain in himself may have accounted for his inability to detect it, or even to believe in its existence when under his very nose, in other people. His mind, so powerful in grasp and strong in detail, never penetrated a single problem, and slid gently over everything that was not visible to the eye. As Mr. Belloc says, " He could only judge men plainly and especially as agents, that is, he missed their secret thoughts, he never surmised in them anything but

the most normal motives, of fear, envy, or what not. Therefore he was wholly unforewarned by any instinct when hidden or abnormal obstacles were presented beneath the surface." He was indeed a man of powerful intelligence but without imaginative intellect ; and it is doubtful, if England had not been a third-rate Power in his day, whether he would ever have risen to power, despite the fact that he did much to raise it. For he was the typical ruler, president, or dictator of a country which had reached a certain state in civilisation, who then vanishes – a shadowy embodiment of the transitory age he governs.

He was, however, not a personally wicked man in the sense that Richelieu, Thomas Cromwell, or his royal master, Henry VIII, were. For his sins were at least partly the result of his limitations, and were consequently those of omission. His indifference to the spiritual exercises of his offices was the result of his spiritual shallowness rather than a deliberate crushing of the spiritual sense ; and when in his last hour he made his famous cry, " If I had served my God so diligently as I have done the King, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs," we feel more pity than contempt. For he did not complain of injustice, but rather saw justice in what he believed to be his forsakenness. It was all the result of thinking about God as he would think about an earthly king, a habit very common in Wolsey's day among the crowd ; and in saying this we have Wolsey summarised

in a breath. For he was born, and remained to the end of his days, a member of the crowd. There was nothing in which splendour and pomp could not and did not array him ; but his magnificent business capacity was never able to conceal the shallowness of his mind. Now that his body has been cold for four hundred years, posterity has no cause to thank him for anything but magnificent buildings and college endowments, and the only words of any permanent value which fell from his lips that have ever been preserved are those of a despairing cry from his death-bed.

During the earlier part of his life, however, he rose with such sureness that it must have been as impossible for his friends as for his enemies to say in what guise he would finally flourish out. They must have felt that a bishopric, a Chancellorship, or a Papal Legateship were all in sight when he reached the age of thirty-five. Or would he end his days as the abbot of a monastery? The portrait of him in his prime, done by Holbein, discloses a face which, though not ascetic, is at least ecclesiastical. Large without grossness, learned without culture, and gay without sensuality – one can readily understand the spell of his personality and its powerful appeal to the rather limited English temperament. So he climbed and climbed, and those who had not taken him very seriously as a rival or a friend at Court before, must have woken to a sense of

dramatic situation in his appointment as chaplain to Henry VII.

He found Henry a cold master. For the King was frugal in his ambitions, not from asceticism, but from leanness of soul. His were not the sins of the flesh, but the worse crimes of avarice, selfishness, and a cold cruelty. He rewarded Wolsey's talent by despatching him on diplomatic errands, one to Scotland and one to the Netherlands ; but the story of his successful execution of a mission to Flanders and back in three days is probably untrue. In any case, his relations with the King brought him small satisfaction, so we find him seeking the good graces of Bishop Foxe and Sir Thomas Lovell, the leading Privy Counsellors, and, as usual, impressing them favourably ; and, even if it be true that Richard Foxe pushed Wolsey forward in the hope of using him as an instrument for the downfall of Surrey,¹ these two statesmen, Foxe and Lovell, remained Wolsey's friends to the end.

It was they who obtained for him the important mission to Flanders, which, executed with expeditious promptness, proved the means of establishing him as an unusually able ambassador in the King's eyes ; because for once Wolsey's high-handedness brought him luck. The same impulse which probably prompted him to anticipate the leave of the Magdalen authorities to erect a tower, and which ultimately did so much

¹ Polydore Vergil, *Historia*, p. 632.

to bring about his downfall, now made him anticipate certain wishes of the King ; and, while on his errand in Flanders, he took it into his own power to carry them out. Luckily for him, he had anticipated correctly ; and Henry sent after him, only to hear that Wolsey had already anticipated his wishes. This pleased the King mightily, though one wonders whether he would have been so pleased with his action if Wolsey had anticipated wrongly ; but it was ever the privilege of a Tudor monarch to transform a human whim into a living issue. This mission to the Emperor Maximilian in 1507 proved the opening of Wolsey's political career, and was shortly followed by other expeditions, of which the one to Scotland was particularly successful in giving satisfaction to the King.

It was Henry's way to bestow high ecclesiastical authority upon those who displayed dexterity in the political sphere ; and so on Candlemas Day, 1509, Wolsey was appointed to the Deanery of Lincoln. He still held several minor preferments, and would, of course, remain in constant attendance upon the King ; but, just when this sign of the King's favour established him in his ease and dispelled any doubts which he may have retained in regard to royal recognition of his own abilities, the blight which had threatened to undo him so often before discharged its full weight. On April 21, 1509, the King died in his palace at Richmond. He would be succeeded by a boy in

his later teens, whom Wolsey had known but with whom he had never grown intimate. It might be as well to pause for a moment and ponder his present position, weigh all there was at stake, and see what his chances of promotion were.

In doing this we shall realise that the curtain was rising on a drama in which Wolsey was going to be the puppet of Fate. There were others, in far higher positions than his, who were nervous about the future. We have already seen that Foxe, the Bishop of Winchester, and Lovell, both Privy Counsellors, were the means of bringing him under the eye of Henry VII. Upon their fortunes, therefore, his own largely rested ; and, while their positions were at least temporarily secure, their prestige and position at Court were by no means so certain. Lovell had been a close friend of Henry VII. He had been a warrior on the Lancastrian side before his master had usurped the English throne, and had fought at Bosworth and at Stoke. In spite of the fact that Henry had impaled the Lancastrian and Yorkist arms together, had given his word that he would never allow Lancastrians to be favoured during his reign, and had heavily punished the Earl of Oxford for disobedience to this rule, it can hardly be doubted that he felt partiality for Lovell. His removal from earth would remove Lovell's most powerful security for position and influence.

Foxe, at the time of his master's death, was growing old. He had watched that master

hoard up money, sometimes from the Star Chamber, sometimes, as in the case of Oxford, from a fine imposed upon a culprit personally by himself, and sometimes through the royal claims on a capital charge. Henry had hoarded ; but he had spent little. His own wants were never lavish, and his nature was mean. He therefore slowly gathered to himself the reputation of a miser, and he died leaving the country considerably richer than he had found it. In order to keep his nobles down, he had taxed them heavily ; and the diligence of his one-time Chancellor, Cardinal Morton, had brought in a harvest of riches. So, although he left England at his death a minor country in the continent of Europe, he left it organised and well fortified in its own house ; and Foxe had been privy to the miser's wealth.

Now the old bishop knew that a heavy task was piling up before him. A young prince was coming to the throne who, for other reasons besides that of age, was not fitted to be king. For one thing, he had only been heir to the throne for a short while. His elder brother, Arthur, had died five years before ; and the young Henry had not spent the last part of his time since in preparing for the throne. He was full of good spirits, affable, popular, and generous ; and, what England loves best of all, he was an athlete. He could jump farther and shoot an arrow to better purpose than anybody else, and the earth-shaking power

of his laugh has been a legend of history. Foxe knew that the ascent of this boy of eighteen to the English throne and all the wealth with which it was now endowed might not be good for the country, and might be even less good for himself.

He resolved to do what others who are inherited by youthful monarchs have endeavoured to do before and since, generally to their own doom ; he endeavoured to manage Henry with a firm hand. Burrus and Seneca attempted this with the young Nero. We know that the one was poisoned and the other finally disgraced. Buckingham had the sense to avoid doing it on the death of James I, and so became the most powerful statesman England has ever known. Foxe, however, had less tact than insight. He knew that Henry VIII intended to enjoy his kingdom with the same gusto that he would enjoy a good feast, with the same rapacious appetite ; and, alas for England ! with an abundance of fare. So he resolved to keep a stern hand upon him, to spoon-feed him rather than advise him, and to keep a close watch upon the royal chests.

This was a foolish policy, chiefly because, with a little tact, he could have managed Henry more easily than he could have managed most men. For Henry was pliable and unconsciously dependent. Like so many of that psychological calibre, he thought he was having his own way when somebody else was managing him all the while ; and that somebody, whoever it might be,

was absolutely indispensable to him all his life. Wolsey and Cromwell were the two who filled that niche to greatest purpose ; and Foxe might have been the first. Perhaps it was as well for him that he was not, in view of the fate which overtook the others ; but it would have served his purpose for the time if he had been. Moreover, Henry was far less savage as a young man, less obstinate and less ruthless ; and who knows but that Foxe might have turned the young man's passions into sublimated channels and so have avoided the blood through which he was to wade to the achievement of his purposes during the next thirty years ?

Foxe lost his opportunity through lack of tact and understanding, and Henry soon turned from him to others for guidance. His old grandmother, the Countess of Richmond, was one to whom he turned in the early years of his reign ; and another was Surrey, whom we have already met as the rival Foxe most feared. Now Foxe had reason to fear Surrey. For the latter should by right have been Duke of Norfolk, and would have been had not his family been attainted for fighting on Richard's side at Bosworth. His one ambition in life, therefore, was the restoration of his title and property, and this would have made him the premier peer of England – he had married the young King's aunt – and might come to wield an unprecedented influence over Henry. Foxe knew that if ever this man came into power personal

ambition would stop nowhere ; and so he resolved to get rid of him, more out of patriotism and jealousy for England's prestige on the Continent than for personal reasons ; but it is more than possible, that he feared, if only unconsciously, the possibility of being unseated himself after the security in which Henry VII's natural antipathy to the Howards had placed him.

So the stage was set for the first act in Wolsey's public career. It began with his endeavour, by the wish of Foxe, to exclude Surrey from the Court ; but it was to end in a battle for Wolsey's own head, in which the earl's son, who had waited fifteen years to accomplish his task, was to taste the fruits of victory. For hitherto, in spite of his accomplishments, Wolsey had never been in the foreground at Court. Even the late King had employed him as an ambassador rather than bestow upon him the authority to administrate in his own dominion ; and, when Henry VIII came to the throne, his grandmother kept Wolsey, of whom she had never very strongly approved, still farther in the background ; but Foxe and Lovell bided their time.

At the death of Henry VII Wolsey's chaplaincy automatically ceased ; and he was not at once appointed chaplain to the new King. The Royal Almoner, Edenham, died in the following July ; but Wolsey was not promoted to his office, as he would almost certainly have been if the old King had lived. Thomas Hobbes was appointed, but

he only survived four months ; and, at his death, Wolsey was invited to fill the post. This did not mean that he was the centre of the scene ; but he was near the throne once more, under the eye of the new King. It does not demand much imagination to foresee that Wolsey's rather irresponsible gaiety, his ability to win the admiration and affection of those who were placed over him, and a certain rough wit that adorned his tongue, would soon win exceptional favour from a monarch who did nothing by halves ; but Henry was in too genial a mood to see in him a statesman and politician of great possibilities. That might follow when a match was struck somewhere, and never was there such an hour in which the whole of Europe lay like tinder waiting for the flame.

CHAPTER II

THE RISE TO POWER

The Pope's war – Wolsey organises a campaign – its failure leads to another – England's victories – Wolsey's new appointment – his power over the King – he renews foreign relations – becomes involved in the European imbroglio – his skilful diplomacy – final ambitions achieved.

THE MATCH was struck probably sooner than anyone had anticipated. It came in the form of a trumpet-call from Pope Julius II to Europe. Julius believed in violence to a degree that was unusual even in those days of settling personal quarrels by bloody means. He could understand no rule but that of a sword ; and his already dimmed mind (for he was growing old) still retained the fiery and warlike nature which it had ever displayed. By his universal mismanagement of affairs he had stirred up enemies in Europe, and now he heard rumours of a General Council being called ; and if there was one thing more than another that this man dreaded it was the calling of a General Council.

Of course, Louis XII had no moral right to call this council ; but he justified his action by a law that was dead, and it assembled at Pisa. The Pope denounced the Cardinals who obeyed the summons, and declared the council schismatic. He elected a number of new Cardinals to support

him, and formed the Holy League to make war upon the French King. This was a rare opportunity of organising Europe in a unity which it had not known for generations, under the dictatorship of the Pope; and the first war within living memory began to muster. In England there was a diversity of opinion about its advisability. The apostles of the spiritual renaissance were nearly reduced to despair. "I was dreaming," said Erasmus, who was in London, "of an age that was really golden and isles that were happy . . . when that Julian trumpet summoned all the world to arms." It was, however, the moment of the politicians, and scholars were not so much silenced as ignored. In England there were two parties—one for peace, headed by Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, and one for war, headed by the Earl of Surrey. Foxe was on the side of Warham, whose views, almost scandalously pacifist in his day, approximated to those of the majority of thoughtful people in England at the present time. He urged the Lords and Commons to remember that war was a terrible instrument, to be justified only if it saved the country from something worse; but he was finally silenced by a letter from the Pope that was read in translation to both Houses, calling the country to arms.

Wolsey was, at that time, naturally on the side of peace. Loyalty to Foxe, and a common enmity to Surrey against whom the young and the old man were both organising their power, would

have decided that. He had by this time thoroughly ingratiated himself with Henry, and on November 20, 1511, his signature as a Privy Counsellor appears for the first time. One of the last letters that he wrote before his election was to Foxe, whom he endeavoured to conciliate for having broken some of his instructions. This he does by suggesting that Surrey, whose reception at Court had been rather cool lately, should be "utterly excluded" from it. This bold presumption on the part of one who was still officially a minor courtier speaks volumes for Wolsey's favour with the King; and it succeeded in its object. Foxe also withdrew more and more from public affairs, an act which ever piled up duties and responsibilities upon the willing and capable shoulders of Wolsey, who gradually assumed all the responsibilities of Foxe, save those of his diocese.

It is, in fact, just as this point in Wolsey's career, when the curtain rises so definitely upon the second act, that we must judge by silences, gaps in the chain of events, incidents that do not arise, and the behaviour of other people, on which we must base our evidence. For Wolsey was careful in the playing of his game for power; and there is little extant of what he wrote. For these reasons his change of attitude towards the approaching war is largely a matter of conjecture. It may even be that he was swayed by Foxe, who appeared, before long, on the side of the Pope; but, be that

as it may, he soon came out on the side of war. In it he saw opportunities of a smashing victory that would raise the status of England and place him for ever in the King's favour. It was already known that Ferdinand of Spain, a powerful ally, would rally to the league. Surrey would be victorious for a moment, but soon in the shade. So Wolsey and the King joined the league, and an expeditionary force left England to fight for the Pope.

This campaign was a fiasco so far as England was concerned. Wolsey, for the first time in his career, had openly blundered ; and the whole world openly blamed him. The army was unused to fighting ; Ferdinand, after the conquest of Navarre, which was probably all that he was out to get, deserted ; and the English troops, under a southern sun, as Professor Pollard has it, "drank Spanish wine as though it were English beer." Finally, they mutinied, and returned home, in spite of orders to the contrary, having accomplished nothing. The public passion blazed out against the King's new counsellors, of whom Wolsey was already the King's favourite. For a while the King – chiefly on account of youth and physical qualities – had been regarded favourably ; but he had spent his father's savings upon banquets, had exchanged old counsellors for young, and had allowed the young Wolsey to organise a campaign. It was therefore against Wolsey that the resentment of the army, both in

high and low places, burned most heatedly ; and he realised his career was at stake.

The King, who was beginning to see nothing except through the eyes of his favourite, was furious with the army. No doubt the flame of his indignation was fanned by their indiscipline and misbehaviour. Out of a growing habit he turned to Wolsey for advice ; and this gave Wolsey a chance that he took with all his heart and mind and strength. There must be another campaign ; and this time it must not fail. He used every ounce of his power to redeem his name ; and the result was a scheme well planned in every corner, one that discloses, as on a map, the genius of this man for swift and detailed action. He struck at Artois. It was a bold stroke, but it might bring overwhelming victory. The English thus exchanged Ferdinand for Maximilian as principal ally ; and the exchange was not for the worse. Perhaps it was as well that Wolsey did not pause to contemplate what defeat here might mean. It was his one chance of restoring his prestige ; and he departed, with his King, for a three months' campaign. Even Surrey was employed – he the puppet this time, and Wolsey the master of the strings. While Henry and Wolsey crossed the Channel, Surrey was despatched to Scotland to put down the allies of the French in that country.

The English, who are the best natural fighters in the world, had gained immensely by practice ; and the lessons of the last battle had slowly sunk

in. The army attacked boldly, routed the French at Théroutenne and Tournai, capturing both cities. Simultaneously came the news of the bloody battle of Flodden, an even greater victory against the Scots which cost their King, James IV, his life. The double event proved the salvation of England in the eyes of Europe. Had the two victories not coincided, the psychological effect would not have been so dramatic ; but England's sudden death-blow to the two enemies who might so easily have crushed her geographically between them caused a sensation ; and the prestige which the country gained from the event, as well as the subsequent policy of which it was the foundation, raised England from a third-rate to a first-rate Power in the Continent.

Wolsey and the King reaped the full harvest of their victory ; and all the beastliness of their age was displayed in the fruits of it. At Maximilian's behest, Théroutenne was razed to the ground, as an example of how rebels should be treated ; but Tournai, being of some value, was preserved. By leave of the Pope, Wolsey was appointed its bishop ; and no incident could give us a better glimpse of the moral chaos of Church and State in that day than the spectacle of a priest being raised to a bishopric as the result of a military campaign which he had organised. Wolsey was delighted with his new position ; and Henry, who had no notion whatever of strategy or foreign policy, recognised in Wolsey a genius with whom

he would never be able to dispense. They returned home in splendour and triumph, and well might their victory be celebrated ; but two things they never saw. One was the discontent that would arise when the glamour of triumph was over, on account of the immense taxes that Wolsey had levied to carry out his scheme ; and the other was the ceaseless war that would be waged in Europe now that the country had tasted blood once more. It had known foreign peace for a hundred years, but it was not to know it again, to any appreciable degree, until after Napoleon had cracked the whole civilised world.

When they had returned to England, the King heaped favours upon his adviser. In the following January, that of 1514, the See of Lincoln fell vacant, and Wolsey was asked to fill it. The new Pope, Leo X, granted this without demur, although he had procrastinated in the case of the Tournai bishopric, and had issued a Bull to appoint the Frenchman Guillard to the see. This had looked like a blight setting in on Wolsey's renewed reputation ; but it was not long before the matter was settled and his appointment secure. The result of all this, one taste of power upon another, whetted Wolsey's appetite for appointments which he had previously regarded as too remote for his present ambition ; and he grew bolder and bolder in his designs. He had ceased to be almoner on his promotion to the Bishopric of Lincoln ; but he was appointed Dean

of York, though he left his duties there to the administration of Thomas Dalby, who was Archdeacon of that city, and Silvester de Giglis, Bishop of Worcester, whom he later sent to Rome. His tasks, therefore, in view of his capacity for work, were not arduous ; and he had his eye daringly fixed on the highest appointments in the Church.

He was already doing well for one who openly deplored the scandals of pluralism ; and, in the summer of that same year, fate played into his hands. The Archbishop of York, Cardinal Bainbridge, was poisoned in Rome. Henry immediately secured the temporalities for Wolsey, who was, in spite of his riches, borrowing English and Italian money, and, after bringing a certain amount of pressure to bear upon the Pope, procured for his friend the archiepiscopal see. Wolsey was now enriched by the revenues of three bishoprics – those of Lincoln, Tournai, and the Archbishopric of York ; and was, by the King's special favour, his chief counsellor and the most influential statesman in England.

England, however, was not enough ; and Wolsey had ever kept his gaze on Rome. That was the city from which all promotion emanated, the centre of organisation and power. The glamour of the Papal Court would have appealed to his sense of pomp no less than its power to his ambition. About this time, then, a new notion came into his head ; and, while his mind was

full of affairs at home, he set a new scheme floating on the Continent for his own promotion. Polydore Vergil was despatched to Rome for a twofold purpose. His mission was to interview Cardinal Hadrian, whom Wolsey had once befriended, and to broach the subject of Wolsey's own election to the College of Cardinals. As a result, Hadrian sounded Leo on the point and Wolsey heard with satisfaction that the suggestion had been favourably received. Hadrian reported that the utmost secrecy must be observed, but that he would write to Wolsey when the right moment came. Wolsey, however, was far too thorough and distrustful of human nature to leave such an important matter in the hands of one man ; and Giglis was already approaching the Pope on the same issue.

Leo was not going to move too fast. He was a crafty and astute politician, who had learnt all the tricks of the trade in the house of the Medici, and he saw a chance of getting something out of Wolsey in return. So he drew up a list of conditions ; but he had met his match in Wolsey. Wolsey drafted, in the name of the King, a petition to the Pope to grant him the hat for reasons of expediency. The letter, of course, came nominally from Henry, and in it Henry pleaded for the favour on the ground that he could do nothing without Wolsey. For the latter realised that if, now that England was growing a powerful country, the Pope could be sure of

Henry's favour, he would comply. It was unfortunate that Giglis was the ambassador on this occasion ; for Rome was seething with rumours about the murder of the Archbishop of York, and he was generally accused of it. An investigation was made, a court sat, and Silvester de Giglis was acquitted ; and at this point we see Wolsey's ambitious and scheming mind at its worst. For he promised Silvester that he would never leave his accusers alone if he would persuade the Pope to raise all the money he could on Bainbridge's property, now in the hands of Pace, Bainbridge's secretary, and send it to him. This displeased Leo so much that it was nearly a year before he granted him a Cardinal's hat.

In England, however, Wolsey reigned supreme over the King's mind ; and, as the Pope was anxious to placate that King in every way possible, Wolsey's power was highly esteemed on the Continent. Leo flattered Henry's pride in every possible way, bestowing upon him the Golden Rose, the Sword and Cap of Maintenance, and the title of *Fidei Defensor*. "The Pope is now so linked with the King that words cannot exaggerate their mutual goodwill," said a bishop of the times. Nevertheless, it was Wolsey who did the King's thinking, his talking, and his acting, whenever a question of foreign policy was at stake ; and so, if the Pope's behaviour was not that of mere cowardice, it was of Wolsey that he actually approved. No other English statesman

in history, if we except Buckingham and Gaveston, ever wielded so much influence over a monarch, and it was not long after this that Wolsey was issuing letters over the royal signet of which the master was not even aware.

Wolsey, however, was playing a dangerous game, the danger of which never seemed to be present to his mind. For, although he had colleagues in the Counsel, he had no friends with whom he could share his confidences. He disdained the Lords and the Commons alike, and was entirely dependent on the friendship of the King. As he rose in power, enemies rose up against him ; and as he usurped one office after another, so one rival after another joined their ranks. The King had come to be almost helplessly dependent upon him ; and he never cared to share the responsibility with anybody else. Perhaps it was this total lack of insight which kept him from seeing the hatred which some of those courtly faces masked. Be that as it may, he ever lived for the moment, and he basked in the full blaze of royal favour without an apparent qualm. There were even those who accused him of witchcraft,¹ so completely did he fascinate the King.

Not only would they play games together, laugh over goblets of wine, and entertain each other at banquets, but Henry would return from some hunt or other athletic exploit and call for

¹ *An Impeachment of Wolsey* (Furnivall, *Ballade*, from MS. 1).

Wolsey, and the two would sit together and discuss some naval or theological subject. Movements that were ultimately to shake Europe would be hatched in such a conversation ; but more usually, at such times, Henry would adjust his acute mind to some theological problem. For here he was at his best and could utterly defeat the would-be Cardinal. He had a grasp of the philosophical structure of Catholic theology which had been disciplined and exercised by his study of the *Summa*, a robust abhorrence of the shams which had gathered round popular religion, which was never marred by exaggeration. Complex in his emotional life, he was extraordinarily clear in his theological grasp, easily able to separate the gold from the dross ; and he must have been an interesting talker. Wolsey, however, soon wearied of such conversation. He was a man of bold spirit and quick, direct action ; but he was bored and wearied by philosophical speculation. So one can imagine the King's chaff, his hearty laugh at the untheological nature of an archbishop's mind ; and then a return to more mundane affairs, or perhaps a game of chess.

There were others in the Court who still remained on friendly terms with Wolsey ; but those who were once his masters were now cast into the shade. For Foxe he ever entertained a lively affection, his friendship for him forming the most beautiful episode in his life. Surrey, who was the vital if unconscious means of getting him

on the stage, had largely disappeared from it, and Thomas More, who was to impress him with his culture and humanity, had not yet come upon the scene. The Court was, therefore, rather a background than a stage for Wolsey at the present time. Foxe seems to have been disappointed in his character and influence on the King, and others were nursing a hatred that would one day break out like a rash ; but probably most of them were biding their time to see which way the cat was going to jump. Although Wolsey must have made a formidable enemy at this time, he was a most desirable friend at Court ; and whereas his ambitions up to now had been centred upon himself, a time might come when he would climb to a position where they might become centred in others.

At the present time, however, fate was opening up avenues on every side that would admit him to increased power ; and a move was on foot on the Continent that was going to prove him as able a schemer as he was an administrator. For England, after the war of plunder which had culminated in the conquest of Tournai and the sack of Thérrouenne, had withdrawn from the Continent ; and Wolsey, who had never forgotten the lessons he had learnt from Henry VII of preserving peace in order to strengthen the nation at home, had declined to spend the winter in a foreign land. The King had therefore returned with him ; and England became more

and more enclosed within its own business, until the story of a dangerous alliance on the Continent leaked out.

Ferdinand of Spain, it appeared, had made a secret treaty with the King of France. The Pope, Leo X, had long realised that "The Holy League" was a strategic piece of humbug out of which his predecessor had made capital for himself by partially uniting Europe at his bidding; and so he mended the quarrel with France. France was therefore freed from Papal enmity; and Ferdinand, who was fearful that his grandson Charles of Germany would demand his maternal heritage of Castile by an alliance with his maternal grandfather Maximilian, decided to undermine Maximilian's power. Henry had fought for Ferdinand in the war, and Ferdinand had promised to help him against the French again in the spring of 1514. Ferdinand had therefore to work underground. So he entered into secret negotiations with France, and then sounded Maximilian. The latter was prepared to join in on condition that the league was formed again to fight the Republic of Venice for his benefit. Ferdinand gulled him into the conviction that this should be done, and so he agreed. Spain, France, and Flanders therefore presented a united front against England, who had just fought for Spain and Flanders against France. This was a pleasant dish for England to taste in the spring of 1514, on the eve, as all supposed, of renewed warfare.

Henry was furious, but ranting against the bad faith of his allies availed him nothing. He consulted Wolsey as to how he might avenge himself upon Ferdinand and the Emperor. Wolsey was not long in devising a scheme. Ferdinand had allied himself against England, so England would pay him out in his own coin. There was no reason why she should not turn France into a secret ally, and Wolsey had the means for this at his disposal. The Duke of Longueville, a bosom friend of the French King, was at the English Court, and through him Wolsey opened up secret negotiations. It was known that the French Queen had died in January and Louis was looking for another bride. So Wolsey bribed him with the promise of Henry VIII's sister Mary in wedlock if he could make a treaty with England; and this would particularly outrage Maximilian, as the princess had already been promised to Charles. The announcement took Europe completely by surprise; and when, in July, the secret treaty between England and France became known, England was at last the most envied country in Europe.

The successful execution of the scheme delighted Henry. Ferdinand could no longer use him as a dutiful son-in-law to fight his battles, and when Maximilian wanted gold he could look for it elsewhere. He was protected from them both by a powerful ally, and the whole thing had been wrought by the diplomacy of his new favourite;

but he did not remain content with peace for long. The young lion had tasted blood in the previous summer ; and, though he had been content to return home to his comforts for the winter, the taste of that conquest had been sweet. Now spring had come again, he was growing restless. Wolsey was always opposed to war as a general principle, having learnt, as we saw, the art of his diplomacy from the peaceful policies of Henry's father ; but shortly afterwards, and before Henry could find any prey on which his growing appetite could fall, the French King died and was succeeded by his son, Francis I.

One of the first acts of the new King was to modify the treaty with England ; but he was anxious to remain on good terms with Henry. So the treaty was revised, and Mary, Henry's sister, was free to marry the Duke of Suffolk – one of the few love marriages among royalty in those days of dark scheming. Having settled England, Francis turned his mind southwards, and organised a campaign that was destined to rouse Europe again. For he marched against his enemies with such undiminished vigour, eating up the land as he went, that it seemed before long he would storm the Republic of Venice. Leo X watched with increasing anxiety. The Papacy had lost again that shadow of unity which Julius had restored for a moment by organising " The Holy League " ; and Leo did not like to see France quite so victorious or quite so near. His

own policy of being secretly allied with everybody was disturbed by this display of unexpected vigour ; and he realised the importance of keeping on good terms with whatever king he could.

— It was at this moment, when the Pope was renewing friendly intercourse with England, that Wolsey struck home for his own advantage. He had always, through the person of Silvester de Giglis, kept the Pope reminded of the desired hat, and now, when all Europe was gaping at the French King, and the Pope himself was trembling on his throne, Wolsey wrote with almost incredible daring, reminding His Holiness, through Giglis, that “ if the King of England forsake the Pope he will be in greater danger on this day two years than ever was Pope Julius.” In other words, he had better give Wolsey a Cardinal’s hat or he might find himself out of favour with the English King. Leo was growing frightened and had no desire to risk his own skin. He might need the help of European kings at any moment, and not least Henry’s ; so in September he nominated Wolsey to the College of Cardinals. The move was unpopular in Italy. England had given the Papacy too much trouble in the past to be allowed to dictate to the Pope in this manner ; and an official of the Roman Court wrote of the matter :

“ Men say that an English Cardinal ought not to be created lightly, because the English behave themselves insolently in that dignity, as

was shown in the case of Cardinal Bainbridge just dead. Moreover, as Wolsey is the intimate friend of the King, he will not be contented with the Cardinalate alone, but, as is the custom with these barbarians, will wish to have the office of Legate over all England. If this be granted, the influence of the Roman Court will be at an end ; if it be not granted the Cardinal will be the Pope's enemy and will favour France. But despite all this the Pope in whose hands alone the matter was, created him Cardinal on the seventh of September."

This letter not only throws light on the feeling in Rome towards Wolsey's elevation, but also on the "barbarians" of England generally. The incident left a nasty taste in the mind of Europe, but it was soon to be wiped away by news of the French King. He had gained such a crushing victory at Marignano that Henry refused for some time to believe it was true. When at last England woke to the fact, all realised that something must be done. Francis could not be allowed to go on imperilling the whole continent by his power. Wolsey resolved to sound Maximilian, and despatched Pace, who had been secretary to Bainbridge, to bribe the Emperor with Swiss help in the event of his attacking Milan. For this purpose he raised 17,000 Swiss mercenaries, and Maximilian joined them ; but so ably did Wolsey manage the financial side of the enterprise, and

so little did he trust his slippery ally, that not a penny of the money which went in the various expenditures passed into the Emperor's greedy hands. Almost at once Francis received a check on his victories ; and in January 1516 the whole face of the situation in Europe changed, for news came to England that Ferdinand was dead. He left his kingdom to his grandson, Charles V, who thus added Spain to the Netherlands ; and Charles, in the hope of gaining a French marriage for himself, made a secret treaty between France and Flanders in 1516.

This was a rebuff to Wolsey's policy in more ways than one. It strengthened the power of France, and almost snubbingly left England in the cold. When he discovered that his shifty ally, Maximilian, had been involved in this treaty, and had accepted money from France, Wolsey betrayed no surprise or alarm. He bided his time, knowing that Francis would live to regret his alliance with this slippery customer ; and he persuaded Henry to receive the Emperor's explanation of poverty with cold disdain. This piece of policy on Wolsey's part, due rather to his ability to suffer fools when no good could come of punishing them than to any foresight, proved the salvation of England in the eyes of Europe. For Charles had to fight for the Spanish dominions ; and he needed money for the expedition. The conduct of Maximilian had already been exposed ; and so he approached Henry. That

monarch, no doubt on the advice of Wolsey, granted his request with every show of friendliness, for Wolsey knew that if Charles were successful he would become the most powerful ruler in Europe. The whole continent, therefore, turned its back upon Maximilian, and England was to the fore of the stage once more.

Thus the gigantic see-saw continued; and Wolsey was the power behind the throne in England. For Henry secured him in the eyes of the country and of the Counsel by promoting him to the position of Lord Chancellor. At first Wolsey, who had nothing tactically to gain from the position, refused it; but finally he accepted it, and became the chief in law as well as in foreign politics. Let it be said to his credit that he served his times well. But for him England would never have risen to be a first-rate Power in Europe. In an important crisis of her history he balanced the King's hot and capricious temperament by a cool head and a calculating policy; and his ability to wait on events when it was certain that the Counsel would have made some angry move saved both lives and money. From Henry VII he had learnt that the country with the gold could afford to keep out of war, and his policy was one of peace; but he wanted something to show for this peace and alliance with France or there might be trouble with the people as well as with the Counsel, whose opinion, it will be observed, had remained unasked by the King.

As luck would have it, an heir to the French crown was born in 1518; and Wolsey saw the chance of establishing the alliance with France by the promise of a marriage between the Dauphin of France and Mary, the only daughter of Henry VIII. This was a popular move, and he resolved to make an impression. So that all the ceremonies that followed the peace should be celebrated with a dignity and pomp undreamt of in England within living memory, Wolsey would himself entertain the French guests in his house at Westminster. The wealth of England was poured out in costly entertainments when a splendid embassy was organised from France. Even the French nobles, accustomed as they were to gorgeousness, were unable to describe the lavish scale on which they were entertained. A sumptuous banquet was held in his house, "the like which," a Venetian envoy declared, "was never given by Cleopatra or Caligula, the whole banqueting hall being decorated with huge vases of gold and silver." The night was spent in music and dancing for the entertainment of the English Court and the French guests, and this was but a prelude to a pageantry of feasts and ceremonies in which the King and the Cardinal endeavoured to wipe out the memory of war and establish the alliance. The proclamation of the treaty and the marriage occasioned further ceremonies, and St. Paul's Cathedral became the scene of a marriage by proxy of the two infants. All England was

delighted by the good cheer which prevailed, and the embassy returned to France with loud acclamations of the pomp and dignity of the English Court.

Thus Wolsey's famous foreign policy began to take shape, and, with his peculiar gifts for such organisation, we may be sure he did the work thoroughly. But it was fated to be as transitory as a dream. His lack of vision blinded him to the fact that minds cannot for ever remain in a state of excitement, and that such stimulants, unfortified by any inward satisfaction, leave them weary and irritable when they are withdrawn. His idea of a Court was that of a lackey ; a régime of constant ceremony and pomp, and the notion of a King like Charles II, who could make himself at home with the humblest of his subjects, would have amazed even more than it would have disgusted him. This must be borne in mind as a partial excuse for his own rather petty ambitions. His ceaseless intrigues for a Cardinal's hat, his refusal in the last days of his power to be served at Mass by anyone less than the son of a duke, and the feeling that he was never secure in a new position until it had added to his revenue, disclose him less as avaricious (which, in vulgar sense, he was not) than as one who could never rid himself of the bourgeois blood he inherited.

Moreover, his appetite for power, and consequently for pomp, was insatiable. During this temporary peace, when the bells were still ringing, we find him plotting for the Papal Legateship

that the Italian courtier had only too shrewdly prophesied. Leo, who not unnaturally supposed that the Cardinal's hat would have kept him quiet, at once refused ; but power had made Wolsey more daring. He accepted the rebuff, and bided his time. He had not long to wait. For the Pope, seeing his power diminish in Europe as kings made secret pacts among themselves, resolved to do what Julius had done, and organise a crusade, this time against the Turks. There were always some kings who, tired of large armies with nothing to do, were glad of the harvest of plunder which a crusade yielded ; and, as Europe had had its appetite for war whetted, he did not fear much difficulty in raising armies. So he sent out Legates to various kings ; but Wolsey was ready for his man. He persuaded Henry to refuse his Legate, Cardinal Campeggio, admission into England unless he was granted a Legateship himself.

There was ample precedent for refusing Campeggio admission to the realm of England, where it was the rule that Legates *a latere* should not be admitted, and Henry who was wary of Papal interference, would in any case never have allowed it ; but Wolsey's suggestion solved the problem. If he were appointed Papal Legate of England there would be no objection to Campeggio's appearing as an ambassador. The Pope needed money, if not for the crusade, then for building at St. Peter's ; and so he relented.

Even then Campeggio was kept at Calais. For Wolsey had other matters to settle with the Supreme Pontiff that should be settled now, in the moment of his own power, or they might be settled never. One was the question of the Bishopric of Bath and Wells. For Wolsey had lost the Bishopric of Tournai when that city was sold back to the French for a large sum of money, as part of the treaty ; and the Pope must give his consent before the revenues of the English See could fall to him. Moreover, there was a pension of 12,000 livres a year due to Wolsey for the deprivation of Tournai. These matters were to be settled before Campeggio was allowed to enter England ; and so they were. Wolsey was now Cardinal Archbishop of York, Lord Chancellor, Bishop of Bath and Wells and of Lincoln, and Papal Legate. There was no more in England that he could be.

In 1519 Maximilian died, and Charles was elected unanimously to rule over the Netherlands. The European scene was now set for the rivalry of three princes – Charles V of Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands, Francis I of France, and Henry VIII of England. These three monarchs shared the prestige of Europe among them – a state of affairs which lasted until after Wolsey's downfall. This narrowed the field for Wolsey's masterpiece in politics, the famous Foreign Policy. He was resolved to achieve a Balance of Power that would never permit one of the two

rivals to grow too powerful, or both of them to be allied against England. The actual phrase "Balance of Power" does not go back to Wolsey, but there can be no doubt that the idea in its modern form originated with him, though something resembling it was known to the Greeks and Romans. It was the best policy that could be adopted for the preservation of peace, once the mediæval Catholic unity of Europe was a thing of the past.

It was, however, Wolsey's belief in Rome as the centre of European organisation that at once linked his foreign policy with the past and established it upon a spiritual basis. This did nothing to help when the Reformation movement arose, as it merely turned the reforming countries against Papal political domination; but, in the early days of Wolsey's power, it proved beneficial in centralising the balance and in preserving a spiritual arbitration. In this respect, perhaps more than in any other, Wolsey's foreign policy betrays the force and the limitations of his mind, his ability to grasp a present situation, but his inability to see over the horizon into the hidden depths of reaction or revolt. Nevertheless, the system was organised upon a large scale, and was administered with diplomatic skill.

It is strange to reflect that, just as there seemed some prospect of peace in Europe, the Reformation began; and the policy that Wolsey had invented, or rather revived, was doomed after his

death to give way to wars in which blood was poured out on a hitherto unprecedented scale. In 1519, as we have seen, Charles V came into his inheritance. On May 8, 1521, he presided at the Diet of Worms, which outlawed Luther ; but he never forgave himself for letting him escape with his life. The great earthquake that was going to rock and shock Europe for three hundred years had begun ; and a large part of the Continent was never, to the present day, to regain the unity which was then lost. Europe was at the beginning of a new age ; and anything that came to birth then was either doomed to immediate extinction or destined to grow and flourish in the new era that was dawning.

CHAPTER III

THE ADMINISTRATION OF A KINGDOM

The character of Henry VIII – religious persecutions – Wolsey as Lord Chancellor – his aspirations to the Papacy – buildings and household – the Field of the Cloth of Gold – the execution of Buckingham.

It has been said that whereas Wolsey was born a butcher and died a prince, his royal master, Henry VIII, was born a prince and died a butcher. Such a summary of Wolsey's career only becomes true if we ignore his temperament, which always remained that of the merchant class from which he sprang; but as regards Henry, the verdict contains more than a grain of truth, and in the days of Wolsey's height of power he was beginning to justify it. "Take any picture or statue of Henry VIII; fancy its cap off, and a knife in its girdle, and it seems in the very act of saying, 'What d'ye buy? What d'ye buy?' There is even the petty complacency in the mouth after the phrase is uttered!"¹ For there is no age in English history in which England became quite so like a butcher's shop as it did in the reign of that monarch; and although the greater number of heads fell after the splendour of Wolsey had been forgotten, he it was

¹ Samuel Martin, *Exeter Hall Lectures*, 1848-1849, "Cardinal Wolsey," p. 321.

who first showed his master how great the power of a King of England might become.

It was Wolsey who quelled England, and kept even the powerful courtiers in the background, more by outward pomp than by any great violence of action ; but Henry was not long in changing the former into the latter when once the sight of grandeur had impressed the public mind. One of the few men in England who kept his head against the rising tide of pomp without spiritual power was Colet, the Dean of St. Paul's. On the day on which Wolsey had been raised to the Cardinalate at a service in Westminster Abbey at which the Archbishop of Canterbury sang the Mass, two other Archbishops, eight bishops, and eight abbots assisted, he preached a sermon on the Christian duty of meekness. Then he publicly reminded Wolsey that Cardinals, like their Master, came to minister and quoted the text, " Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." It was a great sermon, and it moved the humble Warham deeply. As he passed out of the Abbey, after finishing the Mass, it was noticed that the archiepiscopal cross was not borne before him ; and thereafter he largely dispensed with it. Upon Wolsey the sermon made no such impression ; and we soon find the Archbishop of Canterbury thrown into the shade. For whenever Wolsey went in state, he was preceded by two crosses, an Archbishop's and a Cardinal's. A fortnight after the

arrival of the hat he had persuaded Henry to dissolve Parliament (of which it was said that the very benches were draped in scarlet to denote his own presence) and it was not summoned again, save once, for fourteen years. It was just then that Warham resigned the Great Seal, and Wolsey was appointed Lord Chancellor of England.

At the moment in which Wolsey became Lord Chancellor, in 1515, he turned his attention to some necessary reforms. This he did, as his whole policy clearly discloses, more out of a desire to destroy power in other quarters than to cleanse the Church and the State of existing abuses. His position would no doubt for once have pleased the Pope, who had lately declared that the clergy in high offices were not to be subject to the powers of the laity ; but England was soon to come under the power of another Chancellor, Thomas More, who had ever regarded Wolsey's use of ecclesiastical office for the administration of civil power with misgiving. He was one of the first to see that the two not only could, but certainly ought, to function separately ; and that the result of their merging could be seen in the state of Europe at that day. He sometimes approved and sometimes condemned Wolsey's policies ; and so far did the judicious impartiality of his pen impress Wolsey that he never saw in him a dangerous rival but regarded him as one of the few whose opinions he had to respect.

Hitherto Thomas More had resided in the

background, though he had deplored what he had perceived to be the shallow and transitory elements in Wolsey's recent foreign campaign, had been partially responsible for his dignified behaviour over the slippery Maximilian, and had warmly approved the "Balance of Power" that Wolsey had done so much to establish. Now he was coming to the fore as an advocate of the Lord Chancellor's projected reformation of ecclesiastical affairs. A Cardinal Archbishop in the Lord Chancellor's seat would not greatly have pleased More's sense of spiritual fitness, but the sight of a Cardinal Archbishop trying to reform grave abuses in the Church was more to his liking. The Church at that time was, as we have seen, choked with avarice and undermined in spiritual power by a condition of shocking immorality; but a new growth that was going to convulse Europe had, after several preliminary crises, settled down into a steady cancer, and that was the growth of heresy.

This brings us at once into the vexed realm of religious persecution; and it will help in the consideration of much that is to come, as well as shedding light upon the character of Wolsey and Sir Thomas More, if we pause for a moment and reflect upon the policy of statesmen of those days. In the first place, religious persecution was practised and tolerated in all European countries alike. In the days of the later Stuarts its legitimacy began to be disputed in much the same way

as that of war is disputed now. There were "pacifists" on the one side, "diehards" on the other, with a great body of moderate opinion in between; but, in the days of the early Tudors, religious persecution was taken for granted in the sense that a police force, mental asylums, or surgical operations are taken for granted to-day. Hence, the fact that Wolsey was accused in his final impeachment of laxity in the duty of hunting out and burning heretics does not, as many have rather foolishly affirmed, reflect a merciful nature, but merely betrays the fact, for which there is abundant evidence, that he was less interested in the glory of God than in the glory of Thomas Wolsey.

His policy, therefore, consisted largely in subduing the authority of other offices than his own. He procured, as we have seen, the practical abolition of Parliament, and then, as Papal Legate, turned his mind to the reform of abuses in the Church. First he exacted some minor reforms, such as abolishing Westminster as a place of sanctuary, which had proved so inconvenient in the rather pathetic case of Hunne; and, after reducing the number of bishoprics, he turned to the question of the monasteries. This had been in the air for some while, and it is certain that, just as the Vatican had resembled the spectacle of a magnificent brothel in the days of Alexander Borgia, so now some of the monasteries were, at their best, centres of social intercourse,

and, at their worst, hotbeds of vice. Even here, however, the shadow of his personal ambition cannot be escaped. For he betrayed himself as more anxious to reform the exemption of such monasteries from all but Papal supervision than to reform them morally. It is true that Warham had summoned a convocation to discuss their moral reform, and Wolsey's first act was to rebuke him for this interference ; but Wolsey, with all his power, achieved little more than the Archbishop of Canterbury, and concluded by abolishing some of the minor orders. Had he accepted Warham as a colleague instead of persistently regarding him as a rival, he might have achieved something ; but, as it was, he left the bulk of this reformation to be carried out after his own death by the ruthless and plundering methods of his lay successor, Thomas Cromwell.

It was not long, however, before he was forced to pay attention to the incoming tide of heresy. For, in spite of the fact that Warham had warned him that Oxford was becoming deeply infected with Lutheran doctrine and that his foundations there were fast becoming centres of it, he had paid little attention. Now, however, the bubble which had been growing largely and transparently in their midst had to be burst ; and it is characteristic that it was pricked not by the voice of conscience but by the wounded vanity of the King.

The Lutheran doctrine had gained a certain reputation in England ; and, as the King was reforming abuses by a dissolution of the smaller monasteries, and publicly exposing and burning fraudulent images, the apostles of these doctrines gained a certain encouragement. Henry, however, was far from meaning to encourage them. His acute mind had not yet become clouded by the gross sensuality of his later life, and he could easily distinguish between a reformation and a revolution. He wished to reform in the interests of Catholicism ; and Colet, Erasmus, More, and Fisher were his spiritual fathers in this respect ; and he had no more notion of encouraging the new heresies than had they. So when he received an open letter from Luther, the arch-heretic of Europe, approving his action, and saying, " I am informed that Your Majesty is beginning to favour the gospel, and to be disgusted with the perverse race that fights against it in your noble kingdom," his wrath knew no bounds. For Luther was regarded in Court circles as an upstart monk who had the impudence to translate the Bible, quite frequently sub-editing it, and throw it in the face of the monarchs of Europe, the Pope, and the Church. So this disreputable man now had the effrontery to address Henry in a printed and published letter. But the king knew how to deal with him.

He called for Wolsey, and showed him the letter. It was not of great length, and was

written in Latin. Wolsey was referred to in it as "an object of hatred, both to God and man, and a scourge to the kingdom." The remainder consisted of a diatribe against the existing Church, and an offer to publish a book in Henry's praise. The King hardly listened to Wolsey, but, in a towering rage, shut himself up in his closet, and replied: "You offer to publish a book in my praise. . . . I thank you! . . . You will praise me most by abusing me; you will dishonour me beyond measure if you praise me. I say with Seneca: '*Tam turpe tibi sit laudari a turpibus quam si lauderis ab turpi.*'"¹ The remainder of his own letter was an attack on Luther's. He addressed it: "From the King of England to the King of the Heretics," and had it circulated throughout the country, with Luther's epistle.

The event moved Henry more than it moved Wolsey. This was no doubt partly owing to the wound which had been inflicted upon his pride. Wolsey had grown hard against the stabs of such transitory arrows in his slow climb to power; but Henry, who was ever kept under the shadow of a royal canopy, was less accustomed to them. There is, however, another reason for his anxiety. He probably saw the oncoming storm more clearly than the Chancellor, who seldom saw any further than a red hat or a bishop's empty throne; and the state of Germany was gradually absorbing

¹ "Let it be as disgraceful in your eyes to be praised by the vile, as if you were praised for vile deeds."

the minds of all thoughtful people. It is noticeable, moreover, that before replying to Luther the King consulted Sir Thomas More, though his answer, with its rather shallow arguments, is more suggestive of his own hot blood than of More's balanced and judicious mind.

He did not let the matter rest there, but, before long, came out with a defence of the Seven Sacraments in Latin, which was a direct challenge to the Lutheran rebellion, and dwelt particularly long and lovingly over the Sacrament of Marriage. A modern psychologist might say that this was an endeavour to calm the doubts about his own marriage, that may even then have been stirring the dark waters of his unconscious mind. Be this as it may, the book was packed full of theological learning and not a little wisdom. The Dean of Windsor was despatched with it to the Court at Rome, and with a message to the Pope that all the arms of England were at his disposal if he needed them to fight this growing heresy. Now Luther was passing from invective to war; and the Pope had already been described by him as "Anti-Christ"; so the Pope was gratified by Henry's promise and by his book. He made it the occasion of according him the title of "Defender of the Faith." This raised England in the eyes of Europe far more than it is easy for us to understand at the present day. It was a sign of unusual favour, and would never have been

granted to a sovereign of small reputation. The King of Spain had long been "The Most Catholic King," and the King of France "The Most Christian King"; and the fact that these two titles were maintained as long as there were kings to bear them, and that the other is still maintained in England, shows the high esteem in which they have been held.

To Wolsey the growth of Lutheranism meant little at its present unadvanced stage in England. He summoned Latimer, who had been accused of being infected, examined him, and dismissed him on account of his great learning. He investigated the problem of biblical translations and made plans for the burning of all such books on which he could lay his hands. In spite of the fact that the growing heresy made little impression on his mind at that time, he was anxious that an example should be made and that the ceremony should be attended with all possible pomp. Solemnly attended by a large number of bishops, an envoy of the Emperor, and another of the Pope, he went on an appointed Sunday to Paul's Cross, where a sermon was preached and the English Bibles were burnt in the presence of an immense gathering.

Thus he thought he had settled what was going to be the greatest movement which Europe had witnessed since the downfall of the Roman Empire but he began to be proved wrong when a rumour of the renewal of war spread through Europe.

For Charles and Francis were quarrelling, and the Balance of Power was dangerously threatened. This would occupy all the skill and power of which the Cardinal was capable ; and so in the summer of 1521, the year in which Luther was banned by the Empire, Wolsey crossed over to Calais to play the part of arbiter between the King of France and the Emperor. He concluded a secret treaty with Francis at Bruges on August 25 ; but continued to profess friendship with Charles until November.

These tactics of Wolsey puzzled the wisest heads in the Counsel ; and, had he discussed the matter with Thomas More, it is possible that he would have been warned off meddling between France and the Empire, as neither could be trusted not to make a secret compact with the other ; but at last the truth leaked out. The French would, on the death of Leo, endeavour to have Wolsey elected Pope if he would throw in his lot with them. Leo was growing an old man, and now could only read with difficulty ; and Wolsey saw in his own election to the Chair of Peter opportunities for the advancement of England – not to say himself – out of all proportion to what he had so far achieved. For Wolsey was the most eminent of that little band of statesmen in history who have found their own advancement synonymous with that of their country. If he succeeded, he could make England the first country in Europe ; and the question of

failure he never paused to consider. Subtle in the ways of politics, however, Wolsey made capital out of the news when it came into the open. For he learnt that the Emperor would have done as much for him if he had been given the chance. Wolsey therefore gave him the chance in November ; but it was too late to be of much use. On December 2 Leo X died ; and five weeks later Adrian VI was chosen.

Charles apologised to Wolsey, declaring that his ambassador in Rome had done his best for him ; but it is certain that he voted for Adrian when the conclave opened.¹ As Adrian died in October 1523, another chance for Wolsey was opened up, and this time Charles wrote letters to Rome pressing Wolsey's claim, but he gave orders that the bearer should be detained at Barcelona until the election was over. Thus Wolsey lost the only chances of the Papacy that fell to him ; and the next Pope to be elected, Clement VII, lived to see Wolsey's downfall, after having worked not a little to bring it about. He had already come into conflict with Wolsey over the latter's omission of Greek from the statutes when he founded Christ Church at Oxford. While Bishop of Worcester, he had been the author of an alliance between the Emperor and the Pope in 1521. One of his earliest acts as Pope, however, was to establish Wolsey as Legate for life. Wolsey returned to England to persuade the King to call

¹ A. F. Pollard, *Wolsey*, p. 127.

Parliament—the only occasion of its meeting during his remaining period of power.

For, now that his hopes of the Papal throne were extinguished, Wolsey was growing weary of foreign alliances and the wars that they entailed. The King had entered this last one suddenly, at his behest, without calling Parliament, and consequently without raising money. Now there was no money with which to pay for it; and, of course, Parliament had to be summoned. Some money was obtained, chiefly through the diplomacy of Thomas More, who was Speaker; and Wolsey was so pleased with him that he obtained for him an extra £100 to his fee of Speaker from the King. The session, however, had been full of storms; and Wolsey put an end to it at the first possible moment. Nevertheless, there had been time, as in a flash of lightning, to see the hatred which Wolsey had aroused. Thomas Cromwell attacked him in a speech on his neglect of the British Islands and love of continental war; and the phrase “Wolsey’s wars” began to be bandied about from mouth to mouth, an indictment which was unjust to his policy as a whole, but which he had deserved on this occasion for sacrificing his country’s interests to his own Papal ambitions.

The money, however, was forthcoming with surprising rapidity, and Wolsey kept England out of continental war until, on February 24, 1525, a thunder-clap went through Europe. For the

French army was thoroughly routed before Pavia by the Imperial troops, and Francis was taken prisoner. For a moment Wolsey allowed his foreign policy to dissolve into the air. He saw the possibility of regaining all that Edward III and Henry V had lost, and, instead of redressing the balance, he urged Charles to complete the ruin of France. The news was long in reaching England, and Wolsey was never one to waste time. As Parliament would not pay more than it had already advanced, he deputed the Duke of Norfolk to raise a tax on one-sixth of the laity's goods and Warham one-third on the clergy's. In vain did Warham warn him that the clergy were already murmuring against his dissolution of the smaller monasteries, and pour into his secret ear some of the abuse of his name that was going on in private. Wolsey knew that he was backed up by the King, who would come in person to London to speak to his people on the urgency of the matter, and he could afford to ignore the threats of the rabble. Such a heavy tax had never been levied on the people before, and they were almost crushed beneath its weight. There was nearly a revolution; and Wolsey's impolitic treatment of the city of London fanned the flame into a conflagration. Some of the counties refused; and Wolsey at last was forced to withdraw the impost. At the same time news reached the country from Madrid that Charles had turned a deaf ear to Wolsey's appeal. Such

an adventure would have involved another treaty with him ; and the Emperor had learnt his lesson in that quarter. So Wolsey fell back upon his own foreign policy, and formed a rather half-hearted alliance with France, in the hope of redressing the balance.

Soon the Treaty of Madrid was signed and Francis regained his liberty. There now seemed to be a chance of a universal peace in Europe. The Queen Mother Regent of France presented Wolsey with a hundred thousand crowns, the sum with which she had bribed him to restore peace to Europe ; and, with this gift, Wolsey returned to take over the affairs of England. There he lived again in splendour. For, all the while he had been endeavouring to squeeze money from England as he would blood from a stone, he had been living in magnificence. The famous palace at Hampton Court had been completed for some years ; and he spent much of his time at his other magnificent houses, at More and Tittenhanger. His passion for building was a genuine one, however ; and he did much to beautify his homes in other ways than pompous ostentation. For Christ Church, Oxford, was, of course, besides the lectureships that he founded in the university city, of his bounty. His own diocese of York he never once visited in the days of his power, but that was no very uncommon failing in an age when York was many days' journey from London, in view of the fact that its

Archbishop was called upon to perform the onerous duties of a Lord Chancellor's life.

It would have been unthinkable for Wolsey to decrease his revenues to help the country, because in his mind wealth was synonymous with dignity. In his last days he admitted to a nobleman that in losing his position he lost his honour, and the man of old blood was naturally astonished at a relationship between the two which had never occurred to him before ; but, as we have already seen, that attitude explains, while it cannot justify, some of the Cardinal's worst actions. His wealth was as vital to him as his body, and without it he would have regarded himself as a strange man, a lost man. In presenting the palace at Hampton Court to the King he did not feel that he had parted with any of his glory, but that he had added to it in being able to bestow a gift upon his sovereign. For he frequently inhabited it after he had nominally parted with it, and Henry did not take up residence there until about 1525.

Wolsey's household was undoubtedly the most enormous in the England of his day, and perhaps of any day. At the Field of the Cloth of Gold he boasted three hundred servants, while Warham and the two dukes present had but seventy each ; and at a meeting with Charles V he had fifty on horses and fifty on foot, while no other statesman present boasted more than twenty of each. The servants of his household, in the assessment of

1526, numbered nearly a thousand, whereas neither the King's sister nor the Queen Mother of France possessed as many as seventy ; and a State paper of the period says that "in his family there were one earl, nine barons and about a thousand knights, gentlemen and inferior officers." The feeding of such a household must have been a costly business ; as a list of its requirements reports, 430 oxen and 1,893 sheep were consumed by it in a year. This was in an age when meat was rarely eaten. That Wolsey's personal magnificence was greater than the King's cannot be doubted ; and the fact that this greater magnificence extended to his households is proved by some verses of Skelton's which have come down to us.

Why come ye not to court ?

To whyche court ?

To the Kynge's Court,

Or to Hampton Court ?

The Kynge's Court

Should have the excellence ;

But Hampton Court

Hath the preemynence.¹

The splendour in which he went abroad has become one of the legends of history ; and it struck with its imposing wealth many of the visitors to England. It was, however, the awful

¹ *Works of Skelton*, ed. Dyce, II. 29.

power which he gathered to himself in an unwavering crescendo for seven years that smote the greater minds with fear. Deputies, sightseers, servants, and secretaries from abroad may have been overwhelmed by his splendour, as were the crowds who formed in the English streets to watch him pass ; but there is little of all this in the major correspondence of the day. That was more deeply and indignantly concerned with the power that he wielded over a monarch, the secret treaties that were being made by him among the kings of Europe, and the audacity with which he would hold up an envoy of the first importance while he wrangled with the Pope over a Cardinal's hat. Nevertheless, Wolsey had a mob mind ; and he probably thought that he could sway the mind of men like Warham and More by material display.

So, in the short peace of the year 1520, he resolved to extend his magnificence over the Continent and hold a pageant in Europe that should impress it as much as the alliance with France had impressed England. The new treaty was to be a lasting one ; and it should be exposed to the whole world in a magnificent array of colour, trumpets, and all that the heraldry of two countries could devise. They would meet upon the Field of the Cloth of Gold in all the magnificence that each country could muster. It was to be as splendid as a tournament between two countries dedicated to the celebration of peace ; and

Henry should choose the day of meeting. The French King at once complied, and set out from Paris, as Henry set out from London, before Whitsun Day, in great magnificence. For the meeting had been fixed for June 7, the Feast of Corpus Christi, and the place appointed was the valley, known as the Val Doré, between the towns of Guisnes and Andres.

Masses were sung *en route* as the retinues proceeded, and it is probable that England has never witnessed such a magnificent sight as this moving army of colour ; and enormous crowds watched the whole concourse, from the French slopes, as the two cortèges advanced. In the words of Mr. Belloc : " The Kings met upon June 7, Corpus Christi ; Henry in silver damask, with Buckingham, Grand Constable of England, at his side, Francis coming forward at the head of his long line of men to meet him in the valley between the two declivities, and by the side of Francis rode Bourbon, *his* Grand Constable, bearing the naked sword. Upon all of which great crowds again watched, cheering from the higher land above." It was the second triumph of peace which Wolsey had organised in his endeavour to blot out the memory of war ; and it was again a phantom, enriched by no touch of reality, and doomed to vanish as soon as excitement had cooled or passions were roused.

Had the Field of the Cloth of Gold been the outcome of a national conviction that peace ought

to be established, brought about by horror at the recent massacre of Lutheran peasants in Germany or a sharing of Pope Clement VII's conviction that wars were slowly battering a united Christendom to death, it would have made an impression as well as a picturesque ceremony, and that impression might have lasted ; but, even while the Kings were saluting each other, suspicion was rife behind the scenes, and Wolsey had given orders that not a single French ship should put out to sea from England until all had safely returned. The pageant was followed by other celebrations, including tournaments, that went on for days ; but it is significant that Wolsey kept his eye on Buckingham throughout, and, in the lists which he had drawn up, refused to let the duke break a lance with anyone. That significance blossomed out into substantial reality soon after their return to England ; and its story forms the dirtiest stain in the whole of the Cardinal's career.

Edward Stafford, third Duke of Buckingham, and the King were closely related, and Buckingham had long been in high favour at Court. He was a man of gallant temperament, high-principled and generous, but with a sharp tongue. His bark was worse than his bite ; but, although words break no bones, they have been known to break hearts ; and though nothing that Buckingham had ever said was likely to do any damage in that quarter, his tongue had left some angry

smarts about the country, both in the Court and outside. One of his few enemies was Wolsey, whom he regarded, with most of the nobility, as a man who had no right to be in power at all ; and it is more than likely he had said so within the hearing of some indiscreet acquaintance or ambitious servant. It may even be that he said that the Cardinal should have had his head chopped off ; or, in anger with the King, he may have exclaimed about his own right to the throne. In the following year Wolsey received an anonymous letter charging Buckingham with high treason on these grounds. It has even been suggested that he drafted the letter himself. However that may be, he lost no time in turning it to his own advantage.

He knew that Henry, like most upstart kings, suffered from an inferiority complex and was always haunted by the bogey of a rival to the throne. It is instructive to observe how little this fear disturbed the Stuart monarchs, even when there was good reason for it, and how much it infected the minds of the Tudors. Moreover, Buckingham was one of the richest peers in England, his lands extending over six counties. Imagine the wealth that would fall to the Crown by his execution on a capital charge ! Wolsey went straight to the King, and played upon the two worst elements in his master, his cowardice and his greed. The man for whom it has been claimed that he spared heretics the stake out of

humanity deliberately sowed the seeds of a story that must end on the quartering-block. The King scented danger but acted secretly, and it was not until the following spring, that of 1521, that enough evidence had been accumulated to make a charge possible. Then Buckingham, who had been kept in the dark, was summoned to Court.

Supposing the summons to be one of the most ordinary friendliness, the duke set out for London without haste. He paused to worship and to distribute alms on the way; and actually called on Wolsey, who was "not at home." The duke drank a glass of wine in his house, made a gift of money to his servants, and passed on to the palace, a slow suspicion gathering in his mind. Before he could reach the King, however, his ship was boarded. He was arrested and taken to the Tower. A few days later he was tried in the Great Hall of Westminster. The seventeen peers of the Court, headed by the old Duke of Norfolk, were there to try him. He stood, alarmed and amazed, while his own words were turned against him, and the indictment piled up. Nobody seemed to have forgotten a single quick or angry word he had ever uttered. His acquaintances, his servants, and his chaplain rose up and witnessed. Not one peer dared to find him anything but guilty, in spite of the fact that Norfolk, the warrior of Flodden, burst into tears when he had pronounced the sentence. Almost before he had time to gather his wits, and without a single cry

for mercy, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered on Tower Hill at noon on May 17. So the Cardinal conquered ; but it was the last of his famous victories. He had shed the blood of nations to win a coveted position before this ; but, in doing so, he had established the prestige of his country. Moreover, wars were indulged in for such trivial objects that it would have needed some imagination to realise all the horrors they entailed ; but here Wolsey had not even had that excuse. In order to swell the King's already bloated purse he had sent an innocent man to a block on which many a dying man had seen his own heart quivering in the executioner's hand before death finished his agonies. It was one of the ugliest deeds in history.

England was appalled, though silent ; but Wolsey had to quell the horror that was felt on the Continent. The French and Spanish Courts had stifled the feelings of resentment which they felt about the Tudor usurpers in view of England's growing power ; but now that feeling burst out in hot resentment. Nobody doubted that Buckingham's dangerous Plantagenet blood had sealed his fate. Wolsey lied magnificently, telling Francis that the Duke of Buckingham had died chiefly because he opposed the French alliance, and assuring Charles that there could be no question of his treason ; and nobody in England dared to raise a voice. For the King and the Cardinal had it all their own way now ; and

bloodier Ministers than Wolsey were to follow. It was but the beginning of that second half of Henry's reign that was going to drench the glorious dreamland of the Court Wolsey had created with blood ; and one Chancellor after another was going to fall by the same hand.

Wolsey had no vision of this, but the greater Chancellor of a day fast drawing near, Sir Thomas More, had " sized up " Henry as easily as he had Wolsey. The King had taken to calling on him more frequently lately, and would sometimes walk round the garden with him, his arm round Sir Thomas's neck. Sometimes it was his growing wrath against the rising tide of Lutheranism that would take him out there, and sometimes a lighter reason ; and one can hear the monarch's hearty laugh at More's sparkling wit or see the heavy brow with which he would listen to one of his future Chancellor's judicious summaries of a situation. One day, when the King had left after such an audience, Sir Thomas turned into his house, where he found his son-in-law waiting for him. " The King is growing very fond of you," the latter observed. " He had his arm round your neck this evening." " Yes," replied More, " but if he thought he would gain a castle in France by doing it, he would put a rope around it just as quickly."

One can imagine how the courtiers must have derived pleasure and amusement from the presence of Wolsey and More in their midst, when,

indeed, the former had not roused their indignation or their fear. For More was so utterly the cultured and scholarly courtier, his thought replenished with the fine rhetoric of Seneca and Cicero, his tongue ornamented with a wit that was never offensive ; and Wolsey, the son of a wealthy butcher, whose mind ever confused dignity and honour with pomp and magnificence. A scene in which these two were set off against each other must have brought a smile to the heart, if it did not to the lips, of the remaining men of Plantagenet blood. Moreover, Henry himself, with his violent rages, his coarse type of lechery combined with fine taste, artistic ability, and considerable learning, more or less combined the two elements within a single body, the prince and the butcher in one.

Perhaps it was the thought of such a spectacle that damped More's feelings when he was bidden to come into the full noonday of Court life ; or was it his ever-present vision of the rope or the block in Henry's presence ? For Wolsey had to exert all his influence before he could persuade this gentle man of letters to leave the seclusion of his study and enter upon such a stage. More vainly protested that he would be out of place at Henry's Court, and that he preferred the society of the philosophers, Colet, Erasmus, Fisher ; but at last Wolsey prevailed. There his celebrated wit and naturally courtly manners won for him a popularity that he feared his sober habits would

deny him, but he never forgot the lesson of Buckingham, and there was probably no man in England who was less surprised when his own turn came to lay his head on the block.

CHAPTER IV

THE GATHERING STORM

The King's matrimonial affairs – Wolsey's part in them – he endeavours to arrange an annulment – his rivalry with Anne Boleyn – failure in the Court – the King's anger – Wolsey and Campeggio – Wolsey's final disgrace.

It is generally assumed that Henry divorced Catherine of Aragon, his wife, and that this divorce brought about Wolsey's downfall ; but while, undoubtedly, the King's matrimonial complications brought the Cardinal to his doom, the question at stake was not one of divorce. This would have been as impossible in the Catholic Church then as it is now, divorce being a deliberate negation of its canons, and a logical impossibility in the light of them ; and it was a nullity suit that the English King sought to bring against his Spanish wife. For this reason it is necessary to digress for a few moments, and see wherein lay the claims for this action, and what was its cause. For Henry had been happily married to Catherine for twenty years before he raised this question of nullity ; but he had not been faithful to her. Some years before he had realised his wife's premature elderliness, had discharged her from his bed and taken to himself a mistress ; and, by the time he launched this project against her, he had

been cohabiting for some time with Anne, a daughter of Sir Thomas Boleyn.

Five years before Henry came to the throne, Catherine had been married to his elder brother, Arthur, Prince of Wales. This marriage had terminated in tragedy ; for, a few weeks after it, the Prince, a young boy of fifteen, had died. As, however, the marriage had been arranged for purely political purposes, it was still vital that Catherine should become Queen of England ; and, for this purpose, she was married to the young Henry, immediately after his accession. For this a dispensation had to be procured from the Pope, as Henry was about to marry his deceased brother's wife, which has always been disallowed by the Church. His claim for the dispensation was that Catherine's former marriage had never been consummated, and so the dispensation was granted. Catherine, the sister of Ferdinand, became Queen of England, and nobody disputed the validity of the marriage. As has been seen, she bore Henry one daughter ; but she never gave him the son on which the King's highest hopes were set.

Catherine herself had been nurtured in early life amid narrow surroundings. The ambitions of Spain had been the milk of her infancy ; and with it she had sucked in the Papalism of the Latin races. Unlike her husband, who had always strained to a maximum that element of freedom from Papal domination which he had inherited, she regarded the Pope and the Church as a single

power, and she brought up her daughter upon the same idea. She was, however, a woman of kindly disposition though of limited intellectual capacity, and her life was adorned with a faithful and virtuous temperament. She had endeavoured to manage her young husband during the early years of his reign, not without a measure of success; and had accepted his infidelities to her with at least resignation. Nevertheless she took pride in her position as Queen of England, and even betrayed distaste and anxiety about Henry's alliances with France against the dominions of her nephew Charles.

Henry's feeling for Anne Boleyn was generally regarded as a passing fancy, though she seems, from the first, to have exploited his passions to an unusual degree. She was the daughter of an English knight and gentleman whom the King had despatched upon diplomatic errands, and who was a nephew of the Duke of Norfolk. The vision of sharing the throne of a monarch could not have dawned in her mind for some while. So she contented herself with sharing his bed, until somebody—perhaps the King himself—whispered a word about the possibility of sharing the throne. She was an ambitious little woman, probably more ambitious than passionate, and it was not long before she thought out a scheme by which she would deny the King her body until she might give it to him in lawful wedlock. For it is almost certain that Henry was plotting to rid

himself of Catherine, as he had the plea of nullity at his elbow ; but the proceedings were carried out with such secrecy that it is almost impossible to assign a date to them in this early stage.

Meanwhile Wolsey was increasing his revenues. In 1523 he exchanged the See of Bath and Wells for that of Durham, which was replaced in 1529 by Foxe's diocese of Winchester ; and Foxe's name loomed up in his life once more, with a deadlier significance than he had ever foreseen. For it was Foxe who, by promoting Wolsey to power in early days, had brought the Earl of Surrey into disrepute at Court ; but his old rival had since, after his brilliant campaign in Scotland, been raised to his rightful position as Duke of Norfolk, and the second act in his career was to be the last in Wolsey's. For the old rivalry had never been forgotten ; and the part that Norfolk had had to play in the disgraceful trial of Buckingham had moulded his hatred of Wolsey into a final resolve. He died shortly afterwards ; but his son, who succeeded to the title, secretly worked for Wolsey's downfall.

For when the secret of Henry's plot to dissolve his marriage with Catherine became known, and Wolsey, through fear of displeasing the monarch, appeared on his side, Norfolk remained silent ; but when, through fear of displeasing the Pope even more, Wolsey at last procrastinated, Norfolk headed the pack of his enemies who descended upon him, and never let him out of their jaws

until he was safely in his grave. So the drama of these two lives was growing to its climax ; but, when the story first leaked out, the daughter of Sir Thomas Boleyn was not so much as mentioned. It is possible that even Wolsey never suspected the King's real motive, but regarded the nullity as a prelude to a most desirable match with the sister of the King of Spain. This would have established the French alliance and have restored the balance that was needed against the victorious armies of Charles. So he saw in it an opportunity for the exercising of his diplomatic skill once more ; and he put himself on the side of the King.

A secret Court, which probably originated in Wolsey's mind, was called on May 17, 1527. This Court was presided over by Wolsey and Warham, the two Archbishops. It was thus the highest ecclesiastical court in the land, and was possibly the most high-handed court that ever sat in this realm. It set out to make as strong a case for the annulment as possible. All the dangers that would threaten England on the accession of a woman to the throne were passed in review, and it was now known that Catherine could bear no more children. Her marriage with Henry was to be proved null and void, and the King was to be accused of living with her unlawfully. No stone was to be left unturned in securing the indisputable validity of the proceedings. Catherine was to be summoned to the Court, but the summons was never to reach her. She would therefore

be under the Court's displeasure. There can be little doubt that the whole procedure was devised by Wolsey, and no doubt at all that Warham played his part in it, not out of any motive or personal gain or political interest, but simply because he had always regarded Henry's marriage with Catherine as unlawful. The whole weight of Wolsey's organising capacity, which he had so often discharged to such purpose against Popes and kingdoms, was here discharged against a solitary woman who had not one friend in the Court, not even the high-principled Archbishop of Canterbury, and was even unaware of its existence. There is little wonder that she was so nearly defeated by it.

Nevertheless, she put up a gallant fight, although her spirit seemed to have been knocked out of her in the first round. Had the proceedings been perfectly open, the marriage with the French King's sister the real motive, and had Catherine, instead of being tried, been asked in a dignified manner to appeal for an annulment of her marriage with Henry, she might have acquiesced in the interests of the country. Moreover, the annulment would have very likely been popular, for England did not care for a Spanish marriage, had grown weary of one stillborn child after another, and regarded the promise of a female succession to Henry with misgivings. The King, however, went precisely the wrong way round to gain his ends. The secrecy of his diplomacy, the

raising of a mistress to the status of a queen, the refusal to make a political bargain out of the enterprise, and the spectacle of a defenceless woman at the mercy of powerful enemies, which was only likely to stir up pity, changed what might have been a popular scheme into one that was regarded as in every sense a violation of decency.

Almost at the same moment as this secret conclave in London another earthquake shook the Continent. A large army of mercenaries – for which Charles V was nominally responsible – had taken it into its head to avenge the empire against the Pope for his alliance with France. Charles was unaware of its movements, though he knew that he was ultimately responsible for its daring actions. Driven mad by hunger, and the chance of loot in the richest city in Europe, it marched, under the leadership of Bourbon, upon Rome. The city was stormed, and the Pope himself taken prisoner. The Legatine Court had met three times without coming to any conclusion, and the general feeling was that the matter would be dropped in favour of greater issues abroad. Somehow news of the secret conclave had reached Catherine's ears, probably through the agency of her nephew, Charles's ambassador in London, and by far the best thing that the King could have done would have been to drop it temporarily ; but Anne Boleyn had stoked his passions, and his diseased body was already growing

madder and madder as she withdrew from him. So across Europe, across his own ambitions, across Wolsey's achievements and all that they implied, he dragged this thorny question of the annulment. Everything else was to be pushed upon one side until this matter was settled ; and so the Cardinal was despatched upon his last diplomatic errand to France, ostensibly to make terms with Francis on the present situation in Rome, but actually to conciliate him in regard to the annulment.

Meanwhile Henry had to broach the subject with his wife, who already had heard rumours of what hung over her. It was a difficult matter, and the King was anxious to get it over. Catherine listened to Henry and then burst into tears. Nothing would reconcile her to the prospect, and Henry might ransack Europe for evidence or precedent. She was his lawful wife, and had remained so unquestioned all these years. Wolsey could, if he liked, organise a war with France against Charles in defence of Rome ; and, failing that, he could, if he dared, declare the Papacy in abeyance and take the matter into his own hands. The marriage had been declared lawful by the Church and could not be undone by a treaty. There were, moreover, others besides Catherine who were against the diplomacy of Wolsey in this matter, and now that the spell of the Cardinal's presence was removed from Court they saw their opportunity and set about to undermine his position. The King was at last persuaded to take the

matter into his own hands, as being more likely to be terminated swiftly by that means.

Had Henry left the matter in the Cardinal's hands, that subtle-minded politician might have carried it to a successful conclusion, but he listened to his enemies and despatched Knight, an indiscreet bungler, to the Pope. His Holiness had escaped from Rome, and was lodged at Orvieto, where Knight found him. Knight was to state Henry's wishes, and request either that the annulment be granted outright or that Wolsey should be appointed by Bull to act as Legate in the matter. This would have deeply offended Charles, whom the Pope had every reason to fear ; and he saw at once that Wolsey had no hand in framing this futile demand. Nevertheless, he did not know which way the cat was going to jump, and so he procrastinated. He gave Knight a signed dispensation, allowing Henry to marry directly his former marriage was dissolved. As it said no word about the legality of the dissolution, it was quite useless ; but Knight thought he had triumphed.

Meanwhile Wolsey had returned from France, having moved slowly but having obtained the French King's compliance in all that he forwarded. When, however, he reached Richmond Palace, he was not received by the King alone, as on all former occasions, but was summoned to his presence in one of the public rooms, where he was playing with Anne Boleyn and her friends. Public

discussion was there impossible; and the Cardinal realised that he had met his match in the little Court harlot. So he resolved to ingratiate himself with her, and serve her as in equality with the King. He heard of Knight's errand with a failing heart, and, on perceiving that the King would now stop at nothing to gain the annulment, he resolved to put every ounce of his ingenuity and strength into obtaining it as soon as possible. In those days of difficult travel it was not unusual for a monarch to despatch two envoys on a single errand by different routes, and the fact of the King's hot haste would account for another than Wolsey being chosen for the Roman mission. So he probably felt no humiliation, but he waited with impatience for Knight's return.

When Knight at last reached England, and the papers were in Wolsey's hands, the latter saw at once that the King had been duped. So Henry and Anne realised that they must choose a wiser diplomatist than Knight; and Wolsey was the man on whom they staked their hopes. It was, however, growing too late for the Cardinal to be of much use. The Pope had been deprived of his Court by his enemies, and received the deputation that Wolsey sent "in a little room, seated on a wooden bench." This meant that he was really as much in the power of the Emperor as he had been when held a prisoner in his own city. Moreover, this gave him an opportunity of vindicating himself in Charles's eyes and of showing that he

intended to use the Papal power in his service, and he was as convinced as Wolsey had been that the fire of Henry's passion would die down before he need have cause to fear the power of the English King again. For Henry's curiously complex mind, his ability to square his conscience with the most glaring inconsistencies, to conform outwardly with moral law while inwardly gratifying his own appetites, and, above all, his capacity to let the chance of regal glory go for what Clement or Wolsey would have regarded as a whim of the flesh, were outside the pale of Clement's understanding.

So against Henry's conscience the Pope set up his own ; and these two men, who had gambled with the blood of thousands, each tried to outdo the other in conscientiousness. Neither of them fooled Europe, but Henry very probably fooled himself. Still, although the Pope would not annul the marriage outright, he was anxious to gain time. He granted a court to try the case, and despatched Campeggio to sit with Wolsey in judgement. He preserved the right of appeal to himself, however, and so saved his face in the eyes of both King and Emperor. In spite of Henry's haste, he and Anne were pleased with the result, as they had not expected as much ; and the letters that passed between Anne and Wolsey at this time breathed a true spirit of friendliness. Whether or no the Cardinal realised that he was beginning to tumble from the lofty

height to which he had climbed is hard to tell, but he was being driven to adopt the basest means of keeping himself there. Never, to outward appearances, had Wolsey been so much in the noonday of power as he was now, but Anne was gaining a slow ascendancy over the King's mind. She had made Henry interview the Cardinal in her presence on one famous occasion ; and now, if she were at hand, he would turn to her increasingly for advice.

It was, moreover, at this time that the King rebuked Wolsey for raising money from monastic lands in order to endow new colleges. Wolsey had plenty of precedent for this. The Cardinal had, however, unwittingly trodden upon the corns of the King's new lady by nominating to be prioress of a convent a different nun from the one that the King had chosen. For years he had acted in this high-handed manner without trouble, but on this occasion the rejected nun was Anne Boleyn's friend. He was, therefore, subjected to a rebuke from Henry by letter, appearing to upbraid him for the former offence but opening with a remark about the latter. For Anne had been telling him to behave like a King in his own realm and not to let himself be run by his Chancellor.

Wolsey was greatly mortified, and instantly complied with the King's nomination, and Henry wrote back in terms of an affectionate forgiveness ; but Wolsey was troubled and greatly depressed.

The slight resentment which he had suppressed at hearing of another being deputed to carry out an important commission to the Pope came to the surface once more, and he was unable to quiet his own mind. His vague fears were becoming substantiated, and such was the simplicity of his nature that he never attempted to conceal them from others. The ugly menace of the nullity court loomed up ahead, and the prospect grew blacker as he contemplated it. For the King and the Pope had got him in a mesh between them. He did not see how his verdict could please them both ; and, while the King was nearer, the Pope was more powerful. For Wolsey had never ceased to regard the Papal power as the one refuge to be sought in the last resort, even in those days of fading mediævalism. So, while he awaited Campeggio's arrival, he contented himself by administering within a smaller sphere.

All this time the wretched Queen Catherine was kept in isolation from her friends and submitted to a daily persecution. It was now openly known that the King desired divorce for no more political purpose than a marriage with his former mistress ; and, as this sank into the mind of the country, the whole procedure became exceedingly unpopular. Catherine's spirit remained resolute and her determination unshaken, in spite of galling interviews with the King and the Cardinal. Even the Pope, at one time, endeavoured to persuade her to relent. That would have solved

a problem for him in a position that was growing ever more and more in complexity, but she turned a deaf ear to all such proposals. It is probable that in the midst of all this unworthy parade of conscience by the King and the Pope and the Cardinal this woman was the one person who preserved her conscience and listened to the dictates of its voice. For if, like Anne of Cleves, she had accepted her fate, she could probably have retired in comfort.

When at last it was realised that nothing would shake her, the King and the Cardinal left her, and it was decided that all must await the decision of the Legatine Court. Yet, when Campeggio arrived, all was not easy in Wolsey's mind. For he saw, by the drafted instructions, that the Pope still held the right of appeal to himself. Moreover, in accordance with the true logic of Catholic policy, all hung upon Catherine's former marriage. Pope Julius II had issued a Bull declaring that marriage null – in which event the marriage with Henry had been rendered possible. It was now up to Wolsey's court to produce evidence that the former marriage was valid, and so annul the second one. "The Pope," as Mr. Belloc says, "was asked to say that if the marriage could be proved to have taken place, then the later marriage with Henry was *ipso facto* null. In other words, the Pope was asked to create a situation in canon law such that, upon Wolsey's declaring the first marriage with Arthur to be

proved, the King should, as a necessary consequence, be declared not married to his brother's wife, and therefore free to marry again." It was at least logically watertight, even if morally reprehensible ; and Clement seems to have had twinges about it. For Campeggio was commanded to procrastinate as much as possible. He was to interview all the parties concerned and bring persuasion to bear, even to the extent of inviting the unhappy Catherine to enter a nunnery. The Queen, however, who had stood firm against the King and the Cardinal, turned a deaf ear to the Pope's envoy, and continued to be the one obstacle to a general satisfactory settlement.

Meanwhile the King and Anne Boleyn were growing desperate at these delays. It was generally assumed at Court that they were cohabiting, and Anne kept a secret the strain, for which there is good evidence, which she was imposing on the King.¹ It has even been said that, while Henry displeased the Pope by desiring to make Anne his lawful wife, the Pope would have remained his indulgent Father if he had preserved her as his mistress, but this is not quite fair. For Henry's private morals were less the Pope's concern than that of his own confessor ; but a marriage that would have nullified a former Papal Bull was, of course, the Pope's anxious and rightful concern. At the moment when the sitting of the court was in sight, the whole

¹ H. Belloc, *Wolsey*, pp. 316, 317.

situation was suddenly jeopardised by the Pope's dangerous illness, and Wolsey again showed signs of aspiring to the Holy See, the accomplishment of which would have established him in power and have put him for ever beyond the reach of Anne's fast-growing influence. Clement, however, recovered, and the interminable proceedings dragged on once more at an exasperatingly slow pace.

At last, on June 21, 1529, the court sat at Blackfriars. Catherine's presence was, of course, demanded ; and she appeared. She protested her faithfulness to Henry, who was present ; the fact that her first marriage had never been consummated, and that the second was the result of a dispensation from the Pope. Henry had formally warned the Cardinal that he desired a brief termination to this court's proceedings, but Wolsey was helpless before the Queen's obstinacy and the restrictions of the Pope. The wretched Catherine, worn out with constant persecution, fell white and weeping before the King and begged him to have mercy, but Henry pleaded the duty of his conscience. In the end Catherine appealed to the Pope, the only court at which she could even dimly hope for impartiality ; but the Legates endeavoured to overrule her appeal.

The court now extended its sittings over five weeks, and Catherine, with no adviser, behaved, as though by instinct, with extraordinary consistency and good sense. She refused to appear

again. Her justified appeal had been refused, and the whole business was in very bad odour throughout the country. Not only were men horrified at the invasion of an English court by a foreign Power ; but the procedure of the court, and the reasons for which Henry was using every means to procure the annulment, were becoming more and more distasteful. The saintly Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was so horrified by the open scandal that he appeared in person on Catherine's side, but he risked his head in so doing, and, on being warned, replied that he was prepared, like St. John the Baptist, to lay down his life for rebuking the King.

Henry was growing more and more wrathful as the opposition rose up against him ; and he vented his rage on Wolsey. Cavendish tells us how one day the Cardinal was leaving the King's presence, and boarding his barge, when the Bishop of Carlisle, who was with him, remarked upon the heat of the day. Wolsey replied, " Yea, if ye had been as well chafed as I have been in this hour, ye would say it was very hot." He then went home " to his naked bed," from which he was summoned a few hours later by Lord Wiltshire, who brought him a message from the King bidding him and Campeggio " repair unto the Queen at Brickwell, into her chamber, to persuade her by their wisdoms, advising her to surrender the whole matter unto the King's hands by her whole will and consent, which should be much

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better to her honour than to stand to the trial at law and be condemned, which would seem much to her slander and defamation." Wolsey complained against the Lords for their folly in persuading the King to this act, and once more rose to accompany Campeggio in the humiliating and, as he saw, futile work of browbeating the Queen into compliance.

Their persuasion availed nothing ; and on July 23 the court sat for the last time. The King was present, as the verdict was expected ; but, at the conclusion of the session, Campeggio arose and said that it was the custom of the Papal courts to enjoy a vacation at that time. The case would therefore be adjourned for two months. His words resulted in a scene. The Duke of Suffolk slapped the table and exclaimed that England had ceased to be merry ever since they had Cardinals among them ; and Wolsey replied that it was a good thing for the duke that at least one Cardinal had been present, as he himself had saved the duke's head from coming off his shoulders before now. There was something of an uproar, but the main issue was decided : the court was to be adjourned until September, while the Cardinals could gain time in which to receive further communication from the Pope.

When news did arrive from the Continent, it was to call the court off in England and to open it at Rome. For Charles and Francis had made peace and had restored the Pope ; and, secure

on his throne once more, Clement was prepared to make a bold strike. Henry, who had allowed all political interests to drop out of his mind in his anxiety to settle the marriage with Anne, now saw all Wolsey's work on the Continent fall to pieces. The Pope was naturally anxious to establish his new friendship with Charles by every means possible ; and Henry realised that his best hope of a favourable settlement in that quarter was dwindling. Wolsey saw that the restoration of England's power on the Continent was the one hope of overawing the Papacy. It might be achieved with diplomatic skill even at the last moment, if only Henry could be persuaded to interfere with the peace that had been signed between the other two Powers at Cambrai ; and Wolsey might even now find himself restored to power and in the King's favour.

Henry, however, had little use for such arguments. His whole mind was absent from the European stage and concentrated with all its power upon securing Anne as his wife ; and he would let his Chancellor's work crumble, if only that end could be achieved. Moreover, what had he now to gain from Wolsey, who had behaved so weakly over the question of the annulment, procrastinating and hesitating between the King and the Pope ? He might have been useful as a diplomatist, but he was quite useless over his master's comforts. So Henry, perhaps as much out of a sense of guilt and disappointment over

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foreign affairs as out of anger with Wolsey, sulked, and refused to see his Chancellor for some while. He appointed Gardiner, who had long been Wolsey's *protégé*, his secretary, and used him as an envoy, even to Wolsey himself.

It did not take long for the Cardinal's enemies to realise that here was their chance at last to strike him down. He had inflicted many wounds too deep to heal, which had gone on festering for years, and now came the opportunity of avenging them. At such times we see humanity at its worst ; and, however gravely Wolsey may have sinned against his God and his neighbour, he did not deserve all the enmity, the distorted exaggeration, and the lies that were stirred up against him. It is an open secret that he supported Anne but half-heartedly, and full capital should be made out of his unfaithfulness to the King. Norfolk, that old enemy, who had bided his time for so long, was now dead. His final humiliation at the hands of Wolsey had been the part he had been made to play in the execution of Buckingham. Now he was beyond the Cardinal's reach, but his son would avenge him. He was the third Duke of Norfolk, and now he joined forces with Suffolk, the last peer to be insulted by Wolsey in open court. Others soon came to the surface, and all were soon to be united in the cause of Anne Boleyn.

The taxes with which the country had been loaded to pay for the late wars, the failure of those

wars to accomplish anything permanent, the receiving of the See of Bath and Wells into his own hands, the alliance with France, were but some of the causes of the hatred which he aroused. Others there were who hated him for personal reasons—jealousy, the loss of posts, or the failure through Wolsey to attain them; and then there were the friends of his enemies—of Norfolk, Suffolk, and the ill-fated Buckingham. As Professor Pollard says: “Nothing short of his compelling power could have driven so motley a host together in opposition; and his enemies ranged from the staunchest of Catholics to the keenest of Protestants, from the greatest of feudal magnates to the poorest of unemployed craftsmen.” For he had, in his pursuit of power, robbed the one of his estates and the other of his livelihood, and now they got their talons into him, never to let him out of that grip until he was in his grave. Words that had been whispered behind closed doors were now said boldly, were written in letters and appeared in print. Although his enemies were powerless to do anything until he had been impeached, rumours of that impeachment were already filling the air.

They soon had their weapons sharpened, and only waited for a sign from the King to strike, but nobody dared to be the first. Henry had shown very little public displeasure with Wolsey, and the man who presumed to attack the King’s late favourite too soon might pay for it with his office, if not with his life. So they waited, and, upon the

King's first sign of open displeasure, the blow should fall. For upon Henry, entirely and only, his doom must depend. It was a terrible nemesis for putting his trust in princes ; and his dying words, like those of Strafford, record that he recognised the fact. The King had now loaded him with blame—partly, no doubt, because he had procrastinated, but Henry was so utterly sunk beneath the influence of Anne that there can be little doubt that her shrewd woman's insight saw through the Cardinal's alliance with herself and that she had persuaded the King that Wolsey was on the side of the Pope.

The time had come when Wolsey would have to make a choice between his two masters—the King and the Pope ; and there can be little doubt which he would have chosen, on grounds of conscience and ambition alike. For Wolsey, unlike the King, could never have envisaged England without the authority of the Pope. Like most of the high ecclesiastics of his day, he did not so much favour the mediæval policy as take it for granted. Even when all Europe was tottering on the edge of a revolutionary precipice, he saw nothing but the glory which had been, and he strove his hardest to preserve what unity remained. Now the storm was about to break over him. He must have spent the days of the King's displeasure as one in a bad dream. For the first time his self-imposed isolation got hold of him, and he knew that if the King turned against him finally there was

no help to be sought in any other quarter. Foxe had befriended him from time to time throughout his career, but not even Foxe would dare much if the King's wrath once descended upon him. So the Cardinal who had so successfully relied upon stirring up the royal indignation against his own enemies now waited for it to break over himself ; but, dispirited and anxious though he was, there was no cause for despair, and so he waited.

Then, one night in September, Campeggio, on the eve of his return to Rome, visited the King at Northampton to take leave of him, and Wolsey accompanied him. When they were ushered into his presence the King received Wolsey with every sign of favour and even drew him apart from the Lords of the Counsel to converse with him privately ; and Cavendish reports how Anne, when dining alone with Henry later, upbraided him for his kindly reception of the Cardinal. Wolsey dined with the Counsel, and some words dropped in conversation during the meal filled him with apprehension and dismay. For a movement appeared on foot to have him removed to his diocese at York ; but his enemies were moving too fast. For after dinner it was their turn to be dismayed. The King summoned the Cardinal to his private chamber and remained in discourse with him for some while. Throughout all this, and in spite of the fact that he was fighting alone, Wolsey preserved a dignity that seems to have impressed even his enemies.

Henry was still procrastinating because there was one more card he could play and still save his face with the Pope. For Clement had despatched with Campeggio, besides the Bull regarding the validity of Catherine's former marriage, a signed promise that the case would not be revoked to Rome ; and had given Campeggio two pieces of instruction about it. One was that it was for the King's private ear only ; and the other was that it was to be burnt immediately after the King had heard it. The ambassador complied with both these demands ; but the second had been kept a secret. So Henry was using every ounce of his ingenuity to lay hands on a document whose fate he probably realised only too well at the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, if he could but procure it, the whole problem would be solved at the eleventh hour, and Wolsey might be useful once more.

Now the time was drawing on ; and Anne, who probably knew nothing of what was in the King's mind, had already arranged a visit to Hatwell Park ; and so, the next morning, both the Cardinals took leave of the King and returned to London. About two weeks later Campeggio reached Dover, and was about to embark when his luggage was ransacked by the King's orders. This was an astonishingly high-handed action even for Henry VIII to have perpetrated, and was in direct defiance of all the existing laws of respecting an envoy. Henry, however, was making

one last and desperate bid for the missing decretal. He had hoped to find it amongst the Cardinal's papers, but he was doomed to disappointment. Had he succeeded, the whole history of England's foreign relations might have been changed, at least for a generation, and Wolsey's fortune have been saved. The Legatine Court would have upheld the plea of nullity promised, and the King would have been married to Anne before the Pope knew of the discovery. Luckily for Clement, if not for England, he had made provision against such an event, and the decretal had long since been reduced to ashes. All the violation disclosed was the Cardinal's poverty. For he had come to England ill provided and had gained nothing from the royal bounty.

As soon as Henry heard that nothing had come of the search, Wolsey's doom was sealed. He had been kept floating by the King's hopes. For as long as the production of the decretal remained within the horizon of possibility the Cardinal's restoration to power was a question of moment in the King's mind ; but now there was nothing to make his presence desirable, and the hostility of Anne would have made it in every sense undesirable. That woman had so disturbing an effect upon the monarch that he was ready to part with his two most powerful supports rather than forgo her : one was the Pope and the other the Cardinal. For Henry had already vowed that if he could not get his marriage with Catherine

annulled by the Pope he would get it annulled without the Pope ; and this impression of him seems to have gained ground on the Continent with extraordinary rapidity. Not for nothing had Luther come out against the Pope ; and the man who had, not so very long before, placed his armies at the disposal of the Papacy, was now prepared to defy that Papacy to gain the body of a scheming woman. So, if he was prepared to treat the Vicar of Christ in that fashion, Wolsey could expect short shrift ; and so, when Henry heard the result of the search at Dover, he finally turned his back on his old favourite, leaving him to the mercy of his enemies.

CHAPTER V

THE FALL FROM POWER

Wolsey on trial – banishment and partial restoration – he journeys to York – final bid for power – his arrest for high treason – last illness and death.

THOSE enemies fell upon Wolsey like the pack of hounds they were ; but it is useless to deny that they had genuine cause for their hatred, and some of those who shared responsibility for his indictment were anything but of a wolfish nature. Darcy was the first to draft any form of impeachment, and Norfolk added the weight of his name to anything that might undo the Cardinal, and the name of Thomas More, besides other men of principle, appeared against him. So much had been gathered behind the scenes and put into order during the past few months that it was on October 9, the day after Campeggio sailed, that the indictment made its appearance. It catalogued the Cardinal's abuses of the Legatine authority ; his personal favours and tyrannies administered without scruple ; his failure to use his office in a centralising capacity, the one object for which it had been created ; and his financial extravagances.

On that day the courts of law opened for the new term ; and while Wolsey was sitting in

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Chancery the bill of indictment was presented to the Court of King's Bench. This would inflict a particularly sore wound upon the Cardinal, who had always regarded himself, in his capacity of Papal Legate, as immune from a civil court, as did most ecclesiastics in his day ; and it is doubtful whether the court had any right to try him. He returned home and penned a miserable letter to the King which perhaps disclosed his failing health even more than it did his wretched plight. He besought the monarch, in a panic of humiliation, to have mercy on him, and loaded the King with adulations, submitting himself to the most humiliating epithets. The only reply to this was a choice as to the court in which he should be tried ; and, on reflection, he chose the Court of King's Bench, as in Parliament he would merely be at the mercy of a council out for blood. He hoped in that court to receive some morsel of the royal favour. Moreover, the maximum penalty which it could inflict was total confiscation of property and imprisonment, but Parliament could execute a capital sentence. So the Cardinal submitted to the lay court.

He appeared in court on October 30. A good deal had been accomplished by his enemies in the meanwhile. Another indictment was drawn up, and the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk spent much of that time in consultations at Windsor. Most of the proceedings were kept secret at the time ; but, when the court assembled, it found

both the indictments brought against him good. The plea that a Papal Legate ought not to be tried in a secular court had already been quashed by the somewhat illogical retort that Wolsey, when a Legate, had acted as a man and not a Legate ; and his defence that he did nothing without the seal of the King was rendered null and void by appeal to a law of 1486, which stated that though a King could grant pardon for the breaking of a law he could not licence it. The further plea of his counsel that he did not realise he was breaking the law was answered more satisfactorily and in a manner appropriate to a Lord Chancellor of England who pleaded ignorance of the law.

So Wolsey heard the charges pile up against him, as the work of years was undone in a few hours. The imposing fabric he had built up for himself dissolved into thin air, leaving him nothing to which he could cling for support. Every corner of his past was ransacked for material, of which there was no lack to be brought up against him. Had he not urged Silvester de Giglis to prosecute their personal enemies before the Papal Curia ? He had kept England trembling in the European web for three months while he bickered over a Cardinal's hat. It was not that he was ignorant of the law, but that he thought it was safe, owing to the King's favour, to dispense with it. These and many other incidents which he thought dead and buried were raked up against him. Never had a man been more terribly

and obviously condemned out of his own mouth.

There was a host of lesser charges, and Wolsey pleaded that these were not offences against the King ; but it was a futile plea, and unworthy of him. For obviously the court did not exist merely to protect the person of the King, but the whole realm ; and the Cardinal stood condemned in one act after another. Most of these trivial points would not have stood alone, but, taken together, they made a formidable indictment ; for the court which tried him was full of the offended victims of his ambition. His trial in the petty details, or, rather, in the bulk of them, formed little more, as Professor Pollard says, than “ the heated retort of the common law to Wolsey’s trespass on its property.” For he had so many enemies that there was not a court in the realm that would have judged him impartially – one more terrible nemesis for the state into which the legal procedure of his day had fallen, and for which he was himself so largely responsible. The court found him guilty on every count, and sentenced him to the total confiscation of his lands and property and the placing of his person outside the protection of the King.

Henry, however, admitted Wolsey’s plea for absence of malice, and the court’s judgement was considerably modified in the execution. He was to forfeit York Place in Westminster, and forgo the temporalities of York, and Winchester and the Abbey of St. Albans, but later the Archbishopric

of York was restored to him. He was, moreover, not to be thrown into prison but could retire to Esher, where he possessed a large establishment which had fallen to him from Foxe. Wolsey was fully apprehending the Tower, and he heard with great relief where the King would allow him to reside ; and this relief became an ecstasy of joy when his barge put in at Putney. For, although a jeering crowd had seen him off at Westminster, he was there met by servants of the King. An envoy gave him a ring from his royal master, begging him not to despair, for the King desired him to understand that even now he could restore him to plenitude and power. Wolsey was deeply moved at this sudden gesture of friendship, which came to him out of the congealed hostility around him, and the illustrious Cardinal fell upon his knees in the mud as a token of his gratitude. Sir John Russell presented him with another ring on the night of November 1, when the court's decision was made known, and assured Wolsey of the King's good wishes.

There cannot be much doubt but that Henry's animosity had been fanned by Anne Boleyn, and that she was keeping the fire stoked ; yet there must have been moments when, finding himself alone, the King had misgivings. For the powerful spell which had been cast over him could not have vanished entirely with Wolsey's withdrawal ; and the King's feelings burst out in occasional rebellion at his new policy, at least in private. His

modification of the court's condemnation seems almost to have appalled himself ; but the effect of it all upon Wolsey was only to excite his hopes to a cruel pitch. He took leave of his servants from York Place, assuring them that the King would restore him to favour before long and them to his service. The Cardinal had ever been a just and, for those days of domestic brutality, a kind master ; and this pleased the household mightily. For the story is told of a fool whom he now presented to the King, that the poor wretch wept and bellowed and kicked so violently against parting from the Chancellor that he had to be taken away by force.

Once entrenched at Esher, Wolsey might have followed some quiet pursuit, have at last endeavoured to catch up with European thought by the study of Erasmus or the refutation of Luther ; but it is doubtful if, even then, he would have escaped the power of his enemies. Those two, Norfolk and Suffolk, were out for his blood ; but they must have realised, even now, that they had to bide their time. As the days wore away and the King made no further move in his favour, Wolsey sank deeper and deeper into despair. The confiscation of his property had lost him so much money that at first he was unable to pay the servants of his household ; and he tried every means of conciliating the King. At first he made light of his offences to those around him and to those in influence ; but to Henry he was humble

and submissive. He pleaded that he was the first great prelate that was ever committed for the *Præmunire*, for using the authority of the Legate *de latere* within this realm ; and to Gardiner, who was the King's secretary, he complained that he had never offended against the person of the King. He even ventured, when humility failed, to remind the King of his conscience and to warn him that there were such places as heaven and hell.

He was, throughout his stay at Esher, like a man in a mist, and never thought of himself as great once he had lost the material splendour which had been his daily bread. Even the dignity that he had preserved when he faced the counsellors alone at Northampton, and his two arch-enemies, Norfolk and Suffolk, in London, forsook him temporarily. The fever of his anxiety was wearing him out ; and, after having preyed on his mind, it now attacked him more vitally, in the citadel of his body, and at Christmas he fell dangerously ill. Again and again he protested that he only desired to be restored to the favour of the King : palaces, revenues, servants and secretaries, were as nothing compared with his loss of the Court life. But all this was probably no more than Wolsey's inability to feel beyond the present. There can hardly be any doubt, in view of his psychology, that a taste of power would have brought back all the passion for magnificence that was being slowly beaten out of him by the blows of his enemies.

The one man who befriended him in his wretchedness, who was perhaps the means of prolonging his life for a short while, was Thomas Cromwell, whom Wolsey had raised to power. For, among the crimes that were to blacken this man's memory to all posterity, that of ingratitude was not one. He had joined his old master at Esher, had helped him to put his house in order and raise enough money to pay his servants. Moreover, he kept him in touch with movements at Court, and now he was able to help him in his illness. When the King heard of it, he sent him four physicians of his own and commanded the best of them that he was not to leave Esher until assured of the Cardinal's life. An envoy was despatched with a ring straight from the King's own finger, as a token of lasting friendship.

It does not need much psychological insight to realise that Wolsey's speedy recovery in February was due more to his reviving hope than to the skill of a king's physician ; and, for the first time, the King's word did not prove a hopeless mirage. On February 14 he received the royal pardon for his offences, was restored to the Archbishopric of York with its revenues — except the magnificent house at York Place, Westminster, in which Henry and Anne were already lodged. He asked for the restoration of Winchester and St. Albans ; but Gardiner had his eye on Winchester, and the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk were anxious that he should have no

property near London. So they were refused ; but this partial restoration and sign of the King's favour brightened the days of his convalescence and he was soon restored to comparatively good health. Nevertheless, he was advised to leave the damp air of Esher for a house at Richmond ; but Norfolk was going to give him no rest until he got him well out of the King's reach. His harassing of the sick man smacks of venom ; but it is probable that the duke realised the lean spell that the Cardinal still exercised over the King, and that his restoration to power might mean the ruin of England even now. He was bent on getting the Cardinal to York.

Wolsey had been dangerously ill ; and if the illness had not transformed him, it had at least made an impression on him, and much of the fight was by this time knocked out of him. When he realised that Norfolk was determined on his removal, he told Cromwell he would go, if only he could find the money. The money was immediately forthcoming from the Lords of the Counsel, and, at the beginning of Passion Week, for the first time in his life, Wolsey set out for his diocese at York : but he was allowed to spend a short while first in the Charterhouse at Richmond, which Colet had built and where he had died. Here we see, for the first time, glimpses of something like repentance. It has been suggested that in those surroundings he was reminded of Colet's famous sermon on humility, preached fifteen

years before. Be that as it may, he spent much time there in prayer and fasting ; and sat at the feet of one of the most ancient fathers of the house, who instructed him in the ways of meekness. The fact that he had set out for York in Passion Week has been held up against him as a dramatic piece of mockery at his Lord's journey to Jerusalem, but it is more charitable to suppose as well as more probable in his present mood, that he regarded the journey as a religious pilgrimage.

He lodged for the summer at the manor of Southwell, which had fallen into disrepair, and it was some while before it was repaired. He wrote from there to the King asking for money and furniture for his depleted household, but Henry was already forgetting him now that his powerful personality was being farther and farther withdrawn from him. He claimed the pension that was due to Wolsey from the French King, and, besides seizing York Place, he proceeded to dissolve a college which the Cardinal had founded at Ipswich to perpetuate his own memory there. The two good passions of Wolsey's life were building and education, and it was a bitter blow for him to hear of the dissolution of this school to replete the King's purse. He had long watched his foundations at Oxford with a growing anxiety ; but, up to now, they had remained untouched. Moreover, he must overlook the catastrophe to his college at Ipswich. For he needed money, and so he turned to the King.

This last phase of Wolsey's life is, in a sense, the most interesting of all, disclosing a side of him which had not been visible since the early years at least, and yet retaining all those characteristics which had become part of him. The hatred of his enemies was so venomous, and pursued him so far, that even his most creditable actions were maliciously distorted, and the resulting impression stuck in the public mind and has remained there to the present day. Some, however, have seen in his conscientious administration of his diocese, his generous distribution of alms, and the hospitality of his house, the fruits of a true repentance. There is no need to suppose that this new era in his life was the outcome of a scheming and ambitious mind which had no loftier aim than that of befriending the North in the hope that one day it might help him against the people of London. If that was his aim, he took very little trouble to employ their favour to that end, and did absolutely nothing to raise a rebellion.

At the same time an unprejudiced view of the evidence does not yield much support for the conviction that here was a completely transformed character, working solely for the Kingdom of God without any thought of earthly glory or of self. Beside such a man as Fisher, the Cardinal's life, even in his last years, was worldly, and his devotional habits meagre. Perhaps no impartial history of this last phase has ever been written,

and it may well be, in view of the evidence available, that no entirely dispassionate history of it is possible ; but if the events are judged in the light of psychology, and of all that had gone before them, both in the dim as well as the very near past, the darker patches yield up some of their secrets, and we are left in the end with a clearer, if still rather cloudy, view. For Wolsey had just emerged out of a heavy crisis. Moreover, he was nearly sixty—a dangerous age, and one in which transformations and violent changes not infrequently occur. He had been greatly torn in mind and body by the teeth of his enemies ; but they had left wounds in his heart which seemed to be healing without bitterness.

Nevertheless a closer examination of his life at this time will reveal the fact that his temperament, though softened, was not changed fundamentally and, if we remember that it was working in a smaller sphere, we shall perhaps realise that he was not greatly altered, certainly not transformed. The diocese of York had become a little England of its own, an England of which Thomas Wolsey was King, Cardinal, and Papal Legate. His house was a palace in miniature, at whose board high festivities were celebrated. The poor received of his bounty from the gates, and the nobles and the gentry filled it again and again. For Wolsey had not changed in fundamentals but was still unable to believe in himself apart from the exercise of his power, still unable to exercise

that power without a display of pomp. So he held a Court among his new friends in York, and very popular both he and his Court grew to be. It was a pathetic ending for the man who had thrice envisaged the Papal Court for his own ; but it was at least one at which he could be himself and in which he could exercise his gifts.

The diocese of York was, in those days, the best administered diocese in England ; and we have only to realise that Wolsey was spending the force of a mighty brain and organising capacity, accustomed to dealing with a continent, upon a single diocese, to realise that this must have been so. His abundant energy never left him, and, now that he was far removed from the vexation of the King's Court, his geniality largely returned. Moreover, the details of his little kingdom never escaped him, and he patched up quarrels between the lords and gentry, brought husbands and wives together who had been separated for a long while, and did much to improve the dwellings of the poor. His ambition, freed at last from the great sea of possibilities afloat on the Continent and the dark intrigues of life at the Court, found sublimated channels into which they flowed easily and effortlessly and to the general good of mankind. Nevertheless, the diocese received little spiritual uplift, although Wolsey saw that both the secular and monastic priesthood exercised its functions in good order and discipline. Within the limits of his temperament he was probably

doing as well as he could, and at least he was doing no harm.

There were, however, times, fateful and inevitable moments, when he brooded over the days which had vanished. The Court seemed so far away, and Europe an almost abandoned memory ; and yet someone would occasionally ride off to London, or another would return from it ; and Wolsey dreamed when he did not dare to scheme. Sir John Russell, afterwards Earl of Bedford, said that " the Cardinal's courage and ambition were such that he would never draw back were there a chance of re-entering office," and there is nothing to make us suppose this to be untrue ; but the King had left him alone for a while, and all might have been peace in his mind had it not been for the foolishness of Cavendish. That man, who was still acting as the Cardinal's secretary, may have been actuated by personal ambitions or by a misgotten sense of pity for his master. Instead of leaving Wolsey at least comparatively happy amid his new surroundings, he continually stirred the embers of ambition that he knew lay smouldering in the Cardinal's mind.

When Cavendish returned from London with the liveries and other household ornaments for which Wolsey had despatched him, his master plied him with questions about the Court. He begged him to speak the truth ; but Cavendish made a mountain out of every molehill. He assured Wolsey that there were those who were

sorely regretting his departure and who wondered why he had pleaded guilty to so many charges. A few weeks later William Tresham arrived, and reported that a rumour that the King would soon recall him was already in the air ; and a clerical friend wrote to Bonner, then one of Wolsey's chaplains, telling him that the Counsel already much feared they would have to call him back. The same writer remarked in a despatch to Charles V that " the Duke of Norfolk tells me that he himself obtained the Cardinal's pardon and that he had hopes to be able to prevent his coming again into favour ; lest he should, as formerly, try to sow discord between the King his master and your majesty." There seems to have been small ground for these hopes and fears ; but they were enough to keep Wolsey in a state of renewed expectation if not of actual restlessness. The wise heads among his household begged him to be content with what he had got and not set his mind upon the past. Certainly there was much that he could enjoy ; indeed, stories were being circulated by his enemies in London about the sumptuous state in which he was living. His enemies had not done with him yet.

He despatched Arundel to the Court to report on the work going forward in his diocese and to obtain news of his favour with the King and the Duke of Norfolk. He was to persuade them, by every means in his power, that Wolsey had no

thought of his restoration but that he was doing his duty to God and the King. Arundel had ample proof of the latter, and he could point to the avowed esteem and affection in which the Archbishop was held by both high and low in the diocese ; but the Duke of Norfolk would not hear him. Never would he be persuaded that Wolsey was not dreaming of a return to power ; and he knew that he was staking his own head on the odds. Henry's attitude was not unfriendly, but Arundel found that Wolsey's enemies had been stirring up the people with stories of his building and the magnificence of his surroundings ; and Cromwell wrote to his former master begging him to desist from building at such a time. That and the news Arundel brought him from London made it abundantly clear that the door was still closed to him there.

Meanwhile, in York, his reputation, both as an Archbishop and as a public benefactor, was steadily increasing. Even his enemies were dumbfounded at the reports of him. A pamphlet of the times speaks of him as one in whom the former Wolsey could hardly be recognised. For such evil reports had reached the northern province of its Archbishop's behaviour ; and, fostered by the fact that he never visited his diocese, these stories had been fanned into a flame of hostility. Wolsey had arrived among enemies, but his behaviour had gradually turned the public mind in his favour. He was now a beloved shepherd of

the northern flock who behaved, if not exactly as a Father in God, at least as one of the best of ruling princes. His liberal hospitality, his congenial presence, and the magnificence of his household won for him friends on all sides.

At first he complained of too much poverty to set out for the episcopal city. It was like Wolsey, the old Wolsey, the weak Wolsey, to complain of poverty in the midst of plenty ; but a man's temperament is not changed in a day, and he was still unable to realise that he was in the midst of plenty. He had already changed his house at Southwell for one at Scroob ; he was wealthy as compared with most of the gentry in his diocese ; but to Wolsey it was vital that he should be the wealthiest. He was, of course, poor by comparison with the past. The splendour of his household was now that of a wealthy peer rather than of the Prime Minister, and the gorgeousness of the procession that set out for York was rather that of a bishop than of a Papal Legate. All these things were regarded by Wolsey as part of himself, as much as was the nose on his face, and he would never have dreamed of spending any part of the money that went to supply them upon diocesan affairs.

In spite of this comparative contentment, however, the old ambitions had been stirred in him ; and the ill-advised conversation of Cavendish and his friends had aroused in him at least an echo of the lust for power. Failing to establish any

renewal with the Court, he slowly turned his mind to the King of France. That monarch, if anyone, had cause to thank him, and would even now benefit by his restoration, and so he would sound him. Even if Francis yielded no hope of swaying Henry, he might influence the Pope. Once the help of Clement had been enlisted there was no knowing what possibilities might not open up. Wolsey's health, however, had been slowly failing and his mental powers were gradually deteriorating. As long as he confined his activities to the comparatively small sphere of his diocese, that shadow across his mind did not become visible ; but directly he launched out upon a big project he was to find himself frustrated. Moreover, the trustful atmosphere in which he had now been living had already destroyed some of his old cunning, and he put too much faith in his envoy.

He chose a Venetian physician, Agostini, for his ambassador, and through him opened up communication with the French envoy ; and, waxing more daring, he soon communicated with the French envoy himself. Indiscreet as these communications were, Wolsey was wise enough to reserve until later any ambitions he may have had for returning to the English Court. At the moment he sought only the favour of the Pope ; but, in doing so, he gave Norfolk the last handle he wanted to bring him to the block. For, although the duke had spied upon him ceaselessly,

and spread evil reports at Court about him, he had no little opposition with which to contend when so many genuine reports of enthusiasm came to London from the north. He had probably begun to feel that he had bitten off more than he could chew in opposing the Cardinal ; and the knowledge that Wolsey's restoration to power would mean the loss of his own head goaded him into something like despair. Nevertheless, the King was still enjoying the revenues of Wolsey's deprivations and the French King's pension to him and was probably glad to keep him alive. So Norfolk realised that he must bring a capital charge against the Cardinal if there was to be any hope of Henry getting rid of him, as in that event all Wolsey's property would fall to the Crown.

Now Wolsey was out of touch with European affairs, and he probably did not realise the true state of things. For Francis had nothing to gain from England, now that he was at peace with Charles, and small cause to fear her enmity. The annulment had been received by Charles with a better face than any had anticipated, and it was generally concluded that the three great Powers of Europe would stand together against the rapidly rising tide of Lutheranism. The French ambassador, therefore, was not pleased with Wolsey's attempt to put a spoke in the continental wheel ; and Agostini, probably out of fear that he would pay with his head for having a part in this, so soon as he discovered which way

the wind was blowing, betrayed Wolsey, and his communications were laid before the Duke of Norfolk. This was exactly what the duke wanted to bring his plans to a head, and he persuaded Henry, who was now in some need of the loot that would fall to him at Wolsey's execution, to allow a charge of treason to be brought against the Cardinal for endeavouring to plot with a foreign Power against the King of England

During this time, at the end of September, Wolsey set out for York. He had collected fifteen hundred pounds for the journey and would now be enthroned in the metropolitan cathedral of the north. On the way he administered confirmations, and, after so much neglect, the diocese seemed to be undergoing a gradual resurrection. He visited Coward Castle, seven miles from the city, where he met the Dean of York. There it was, on the eve of his enthronement after so many years of his archiepiscopal office, that the blow fell. The ports of England were suddenly closed, messengers arrived at the Castle post-haste from London, the doors were guarded by force of arms, and Wolsey was arrested for high treason. The convoy was headed by the Earl of Northumberland, who does not seem to have relished his task, and the miserable Agostini was brought with them in custody. At first the Cardinal was dumb-founded, but when he saw his betrayer brought forward he made no resistance and submitted himself to be taken away a prisoner.

Wolsey was arrested on November 4, 1530, and as the winter set in his health began to fail. All realised that the journey to London would have to be made slowly, by stages ; but Northumberland was anxious that they should depart as soon as possible from a diocese where Wolsey was obviously so beloved. At first he wished to refuse him all leave-taking, but, probably through fear of a tumult, he finally relented. So, five days later, before the company set out for London, Wolsey bade farewell to his assembled household. This he did in a kind and dignified manner, thanking them for their diligence and faithfulness, and assuring them, as he always did, that the King was their true and sovereign Lord. He shook hands with each one as they came around him, and then they knelt weeping while he moved out to where an assemblage stood waiting to see him depart. " God save your grace," they cried out, and knelt while he blessed them. On his journey forward they crowded after him through the town, weeping and lamenting and calling upon God to save him.

The party managed to reach Pontefract Abbey by nightfall, and the next day arrived at Doncaster. It was not until the third evening that Sheffield Park was reached, where the Earl of Shrewsbury had been commanded to expect him. The procession was moving ever slower and slower. Wolsey had only been provided with a mule, and his formerly robust health, which had

received a fatal blow during the illness at Esher, had been left frail, and he was growing ill. Had he been able to spend the winters among the comforts of his little Court at York he might have survived another dozen years, for he was not an old man ; but he was unaccustomed to exposure. The long journey and the uncomfortable and humiliating mode of transport were telling on his health, and by the time he reached Sheffield Park he was worn out. The Earl of Shrewsbury kept him there for nearly three weeks, partially nursing him back to health ; but he was fast growing beyond cure. The harm had been done.

While he was thus ailing, the last blow fell upon him, the blow that was to shatter the courage which had been proof against so much adversity. Sir William Kingston arrived from London with a commission from the King and a guard of twenty-four soldiers to take him to the Tower. Shrewsbury, realising the Cardinal's increasing illness, did not dare to break the news suddenly but despatched Cavendish to talk him round. That kindly but foolish man endeavoured to persuade him that Henry had despatched an armed guard to bring him safely to his presence. Wolsey, however, saw through the thin veil of plausibility and asked that Kingston might be sent to him. When that officer arrived and knelt before him, Wolsey besought him to stand up, saying that he had not come before a Cardinal Archbishop but a man replete with misery. The

next day they all remounted and pushed on to Hardwick Hall, and by the following night achieved Nottingham itself. The next day was Saturday ; and in the evening they rode into Leicester. The Cardinal could go no farther.

The monks of Leicester Abbey gathered in the darkness to meet him, with their torches aflame. The journey had been made with such difficulty that night had actually fallen before they entered the city. They were assembled there to greet him in honour of his office, and expected to see the powerful frame of the dignified Cardinal. Instead of that they found an old man, withered to a shadow of what he had been, who had to be lifted from his mule by the attendants. " Father Abbot," he said, as the Prior came forward to meet him, " I am come to leave my bones among you." So they carried him up to the bed from which he was never to rise again. For Wolsey had been attacked by dysentery earlier in the journey and was now desperately ill. A fatal disease had overtaken him in time to save him from the death to which his enemies were slowly bringing him. He was far from London and the King's care, and there was no Court physician to wait upon him. There was but a local doctor who had already done him more harm than good ; and, in spite of the doom that the wretched Cardinal so well deserved, it is impossible not to feel a profound pity for the forsaken and pain-stricken body that was laid upon his bed that night.

The faithful Cavendish was up with him all that night and the next day, which was Sunday, throughout most of which Wolsey was delirious ; but a drama had been enacted in the house that he had left behind near York that was going to harass his last hours. For the Earl of Northumberland had remained by the King's orders to ransack his papers, and there he came across a note of the fifteen hundred pounds that Wolsey had raised to go to York. It must be remembered that he did not realise how ill Wolsey was when he sent out an envoy to Leicester, commanding Kingston to discover from Wolsey how he had obtained the money ; but the incident was unfortunate enough. Wolsey was not to be allowed to die in peace. It was on Monday morning that the messenger arrived. Wolsey had spent a more peaceful night, but was obviously drawing to his close. Kingston, however, did not dare disobey the royal command. He came up to his room and asked him how he had raised the money, and where it was. Wolsey replied from his pillow that the money had been raised of many people and was now in the hands of a trusty friend. He begged to be allowed a little while before he should disclose whom ; and it is painful to reflect that the money was almost certainly spent.

During the day Wolsey remained conscious and had time in which to think about his soul in preparation for death. That to which he had been blind throughout his whole life, the spiritual

welfare of the nation to which he dictated, now came out and haunted him. He spent much time in converse, saying how he had ever been at heart against the King's new marriage; and warning Kingston, for the first time, against his royal master's obstinacy and self-will. He also spoke before Cavendish of his hatred of the new doctrines – probably a psychological compensation for his own failure to stamp them out – and attributed to Wycliffe all the troubles that had come upon England. Then he fell into contemplation; and, as his confession the following morning lasted for one hour, we may hope that he pondered deeply upon his own sins. Towards evening his conversation became mingled with delirium and he lost consciousness. He was watched throughout the night, and, very early the next morning, his confessor came to him. He was shrived, the *viaticum* was administered, and the awful words that tell the naked soul to go before its Maker were pronounced over him.

Kingston returned to plague him once more about the money. Even in that distant chamber of death the shadow of the King's power could not be escaped. Kingston dared not return to his master without an answer. The unhappy Wolsey complained of being tormented. Kingston saw his anguish and fell to comforting him. "Well, well," said Wolsey, "I see the matter against me how it is framed, but if I had served my God so diligently as I have done the King he would not

have given me over in my grey hairs. Howbeit, this is the just reward that I must receive for my worldly diligence and pains that I had to do him service, only to satisfy his vain pleasure, not regarding my godly duty." To the last he maintained that he had done the King no wrong, and he called upon those present to ask their royal sovereign in what he had ever offended. Then his tongue faltered ; but before the end he said, " Master Kingston, farewell. I can no more but wish all things to have good success. My time draweth on fast." His breath failed him, and the abbot moved over to his bed. Then, as the clock struck eight, he died. " And calling to our remembrance his words of the day before," says Cavendish, " how he said that at eight of the clock we should lose our master, one of us looked upon another supposing that he prophesied of his departure."

So passed Wolsey ; and before evening on the following day his body was buried in the " tyrants' grave " at Leicester. All that was left of his wealth, his household, and his revenue was forfeit to the King ; and the man who had owned more land than any nobleman of his day, and whose households put the King's into the shade, was spared a little earth for his mortal remains. His enemies had had the sweet dish of their revenge dashed from their lips just as it was within their grasp ; but London was greatly relieved by his removal from the world. His shadow had never

ceased to stalk like a bogey through the mind of Europe while he was still alive in it ; and now the whole country was free from a menace which never ceased to threaten it—the menace of Wolsey's return to power, with all the changes and the backslidings which that restoration would have caused. The London crowd was robbed of the sight of his death upon the open block, but there were no doubt great rejoicings on the night that the news of his death reached the capital. Only among the Yorkshire villages had Wolsey set a new light burning in the evening of his life, a light that was remembered long after he had gone from among them, in the form of happier and more prosperous homes ; and it may not count for nothing in the final scale of things that a few tears were shed for him, when the news of his end came to London, by a poor fool in the King's service who mourned the death of a kind master.

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